China and the New Asian Security Concept:
The Case of post-2014 Afghanistan

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i. Foreword and Acknowledgements

Before you lies my thesis ‘China and the New Asian Security Concept - the case of post-2014 Afghanistan’. By completing this thesis, my time at the Leiden University studying Crisis and Security Management has come to an end. In this foreword I would therefore like to thank the people that contributed to the creation of this thesis. First of all, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor dr. I. d’Hooghe for her constructive feedback and overall guidance to help me complete my research and write this thesis. I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of my study advisor ms drs. J.A.D. den Heijer. Second, I would like to express my gratitude to my respondents dr. F.P. van der Putten, mr. R. Pantucci and dr. B. Gill for sharing their expertise on the complex case of China’s role in Afghanistan. Lastly, I want to thank my family, girlfriend and friends for their unconditional support during my studies and during the completion of my master thesis in particular.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis,

Fokko Dijksterhuis

Utrecht,

Augustus 2016
ii. Abstract

In 2014, the war in Afghanistan came to an official end. Both the U.S. and the NATO announced the end of their combat operations and transferred full security responsibility to the Afghan Security Forces. Unfortunately, this did not mean Afghanistan was no longer in a state of war. On the contrary, the security situation in Afghanistan has only deteriorated over the last years. With western troop withdrawing, people speculated about China’s capability and willingness to fill the Afghan ‘security void’. While China repeatedly stressed that it was not willing to participate in military operations, Beijing did say it was willing to play a bigger role in Afghanistan. Insights into the Chinese approach to Afghanistan can be derived from the New Asian Security Concept. This concept entails the Chinese view on how to uphold and promote international security. This thesis entails a research of China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan, by examining whether Beijing has put the principles of the New Asian Security Concept into practice in the war-torn country.

Most of the findings underscore a cautionary application of the principles: an approach that could be described as both modest and significant at the same time. There is no conclusive evidence that suggests that China violates any of the principles of the New Asian Security Concept. China’s involvement with Afghan domestic political affairs does suggest that in Afghanistan, Beijing has moved towards a more ‘flexible’ interpretation of the ‘non-interference’ principle. In terms of the contributions to security that the concept prescribes, China has made small, but nonetheless important steps to support the Afghan government in the period after 2014. These contributions could be interpreted as modest when considering how much more China could offer or in comparison to commitments of other countries. However, in comparison to China’s minimal contributions prior to 2014, there are significant steps forward. Finally, China’s efforts to put the New Asian Security Concept in practice are best expressed by its willingness to cooperate with other countries to promote Afghan stability. In sum, findings indicate a modest, but significant application of the principles of the New Asian Security Concept in post-2014 Afghanistan.

Reflecting on China’s role in international security, these findings lead to a number of observations. Most importantly, China’s conduct in Afghanistan underscores that Beijing is more willing to get involved with its external environment. Contrary to the oft-cited conflicts in the Chinese seas, this is not an assertiveness of the perceived ‘aggressive’ kind that is associated with the ‘China Threat’ ideas. In this case, China’s behavior is constructive to Afghanistan’s security and therefore more in line with the ‘China’s Peaceful Development’ theory. At the same time, Beijing’s approach to Afghanistan is somewhat problematic. China highlights economic development as the foundation for stability, and has indeed made economic commitments in Afghanistan to that end. However, the Afghan central government is not able to fully protect Chinese investments in the country and China is still wary to provide concrete security or military support. Without a security component to help Afghanistan safeguard investments, it is questionable whether these Chinese investments will reach their full potential, if projects reach operational stages at all. In sum, the Chinese approach on the one hand stresses the interconnectedness between economy and security. However, by mainly emphasizing the impact of economic development on security, this approach consequently tends to overlook the impact of security issues on economic development. This case-study illustrates the difficulties of applying such an approach to a fragile country like Afghanistan, where overall security is such a big issue of concern.
### iii. Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABP</td>
<td>Afghan Border Police</td>
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<td>ANSF</td>
<td>Afghan National Security Forces</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>CICA</td>
<td>Conference on Interactions and Confidence-Building in Asia</td>
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<td>CPEC</td>
<td>China-Pakistan Economic Corridor</td>
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<td>ETIM</td>
<td>East Turkestan Islamic Movement</td>
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<td>FMPRC</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
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<td>MFAIRA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan</td>
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<td>NASC</td>
<td>New Asian Security Concept</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>New Security Concept</td>
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<td>OBOR</td>
<td>One Belt, One Road</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>The People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>SCO</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organization</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>XUAR</td>
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Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Post-2014 Afghanistan: a ‘security vacuum’?

Thirteen years after the intervention in 2001, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States formally ended Operation Enduring Freedom, which became synonymous to the war in Afghanistan. Following years of conflict and transition, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANFS) assumed full security responsibility at the end of 2014 and the mission of the so-called ISAF (International Security Assistance Forces) came to an end. From 2015 on, only a minority of allied forces would continue to provide non-combat assistance through a follow-up NATO-led mission. This mission, called Resolute Support, would be limited to providing training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions (NATO, 2015). With Afghan forces officially in control, 2015 heralded a new chapter for Afghanistan’s domestic security.

However, as problematic as the military intervention in Afghanistan turned out to be, it was argued by both analysts and regional statesmen that the end of the ISAF mission came too early (Ruttig, 2013).1 Security overall was deteriorating in Afghanistan and although the Afghan National Security Forces had officially taken the lead, questions remained about their effectiveness and the government’s dependence on international help (Smith, 2014:1). Even though the international forces ousted the Taliban from power in 2002, political insurgency and accompanying violence has continued to be a problem ever since. The international forces had just limited success in achieve their goals, with their primary success being the elimination of Osama bin Laden and the eradication of most of the Al Qaeda stronghold in the country. Quite problematically, in terms of security, Afghanistan was becoming more, rather than less, unstable, with civilian casualty rates increasing year after year: in 2011 for example, a number of 3,021 civilians were killed, a level that exceeded even those seen under Taliban regime in the 1990’s (Aris & Snetkov, 2012:1). The latest United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report on violence in Afghanistan illustrates that there has not been a decline in recent years: the number of Afghan casualties in 2015 culminated into a record high of 11,000 (2016). This increase in violence in Afghanistan since 2003 led some to argue that the military intervention, reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan have simply been unsuccessful (Wittmeyer, 2013). Despite of the development of the Afghan security forces and the presence of allied troops, the country largely remains under the sway of local militia, tribal clans, and criminal organizations (Freedom House, 2013). In addition, there were doubts about the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces to tend to the security in the country. An independent 2014 U.S. Congress -commissioned report identified six areas where the ANSF’s faced significant capability gaps, including mobility, air support, logistics, intelligence, communication and coordination, and recruitment and training (Schroden et al, 2014:.4). In addition, there were reports about behavioral problems in the ANSF, in relation to motivation, absenteeism, desertion and even corruption (Smith, 2014:3).

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1 Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov for example stressed: ‘it is necessary to postpone the deadline for troop withdrawal’ in early 2014 (European Dialogue, 2014), and for more regional reactions to the announcement of U.S. withdrawal of that kind, see Middle East Policy Council (2011).
All of these issues enabled groups such as the Taliban to increasingly engage in activities aimed to challenge the government control at local, provincial, and even national levels (Reeves, 2014, pg. 4). These problematic developments in Afghanistan led some to argue that the withdrawal of western troops in 2014 would lead to a so-called ‘security vacuum’ in the country (see for example Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2014:3 and Reeves, 2014:3).

This is exactly why in October 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (MFAIRA) announced that the United States signed another bilateral agreement with Afghanistan, to extend the permit for US and NATO troops to stay in Afghanistan ‘to 2024 and beyond’. Still, the US troop presence would be reduced to approximately 9,800 in 2015 and their primary target would only be to continue the training of Afghanistan’s roughly 350,000 security forces (MFAIRA, 2014). In May 2015, the NATO followed the US lead and also decided to maintain some troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016. This mission too would have a light footprint that is foremost aimed to help the Afghan security forces and institutions to become self-sufficient (NATO, 2015). Arguments that a full withdrawal of western troops would result in a ‘security-vacuum’ in post-2014 Afghanistan where thus a bit premature, but it is certainly true that the western security footprint in Afghanistan was steadily reduced.

In sum, Afghanistan entered a new chapter of its history in the year 2014. The Afghan National Security Forces attained full security responsibility and while the impending full withdrawal of western forces was halted, their presence was down-scaled in numbers and limited to non-combat purposes. The international interventions in Afghanistan have had very limited success, and sadly, the level of violence and instability in Afghanistan has only increased over the last years. Combined with anxieties about the capabilities of the ANSF, there were serious concerns about Afghanistan’s post-2014 future.

1.2 China and Afghan Stability

With western troops withdrawing, eyes turned to other actors to see whether they would be able and willing to take on a bigger role in Afghanistan’s security. Some argued that China could be a well-suited candidate, when taking into consideration Beijing’s desire for regional stability, China’s growing capabilities and its geographic proximity to Afghanistan (Zhiqin & Lang, 2015). While the presence of western forces in Afghanistan is well-known and much debated, China’s role in Afghanistan on the contrary, has garnered little international attention. The obvious reason for this is –as will be elaborated upon later– that China has been nearly absent from the international missions in Afghanistan since 2001, both in terms of troops, equipment and support. Up until 2014, China’s involvement in the country has mostly been limited to economic investments, leading many western critics to argue that China was ‘free-riding’ the stabilization efforts in Afghanistan (Downs, 2012: 65). U.S. president Obama made similar comments when he urged China to become a global stakeholder and he argued that China’s low profile on international security issues suggests that over the last 30 years, China has indeed been a free-rider (Chen, 2014). However, with western forces gradually decreasing their military footprint in Afghanistan, there were several indications that Beijing was willing to take on a more active role in the promotion of security and stability in
Afghanistan. Late October 2014, Afghanistan’s newly inaugurated president Ashraf Ghani made his foreign visit to Beijing to discuss regional security with president Xi Jinping from China, and both emphasized their commitment to elevate their partnership to a higher level (Martina, 2014). Janan Mozasai, Afghanistan’s ambassador to neighboring Pakistan, explained this visit as a clear signal that both countries were determined to further develop and strengthen their relation in the years to come. He highlighted Afghanistan’s hope that China’s support would help their country overcome economic and security challenges in the light of the withdrawal of western troops (Gul, 2014). Just several weeks later in November, Beijing hosted the fourth round of an international conference on Afghanistan under the name of the ‘Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process’. Spokesperson Hua Chunying of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FMPRC) stated that ‘by hosting this conference, China hopes to showcase its support for the peaceful reconstruction in Afghanistan’ (2014a).

Merely two months later in July 2014, Beijing appointed a high-level Special Envoy on Afghan Affairs, to step up the communication with all parties in Afghanistan in order to safeguard and promote peace, stability and development in the country (FMPRC, 2014b). China started appointing these ‘special envoys’ to handle hot-bottom international issues since 2002 (Guo & Blanchard, 2010:25). This started with a Special Envoy to Middle-Eastern affairs (2002), which remains a permanent post up-to-date, followed by Special Envoys to the Korean Peninsula (2004), the Darfur issue in Sudan (2007), African Affairs (2007), the Myanmar Issue as a part of Asian Affairs (2013), Afghanistan in 2014 and most recently for the Syrian Crisis in 2016. These Special Envoys have always been experienced diplomats, as in the case of Afghanistan: Sun Yuxi, former Ambassador to both Afghanistan and India. Relatively little is known about the exact roles, besides the intention to step up communications with all relevant parties in these ‘hotbeds’. In that regard, these Special Envoys have had mixed results: in both Africa and Myanmar they reportedly have played key roles in regional conflicts, while the envoys to the Middle East were less successful (Lee, 2014). The appointment of a Special Envoy to Afghanistan was another strong signal of the relevance that Beijing attached to the country and in his first address to western media, Sun Yuxi stressed that China was ready for a ‘bigger role’ (as cited in Rashid, 2014).

These diplomatic developments led to speculations that China was considering a more overt security role in post-2014 Afghanistan. With western troops pulling out, people argued that China was ready to play a more prominent part in Afghanistan’s reconstruction. However, as mentioned earlier, China has avoided to become entangled in the international missions in Afghanistan. This position stands firm within a tradition of ‘non-interference’. This is the long-standing Chinese principle to refrain from interfering with another country’s domestic politics, which has for a long time motivated China to not get involved with any military engagements abroad. The Chinese have indeed repeatedly stressed said that they will never deploy troops in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2014). While political intentions to intensify security cooperation were made public, the logical follow-up question was: what exactly will China do to promote Afghan stability and security now that the presence of western troops in the war-torn country is heavily reduced?

Some insights into that question can be derived from an important speech that Chinese President Xi Jinping made in early 2014, when he elaborated on the Chinese view on international security at a meeting of the Conference on Interactions and Confidence-Building in Asia (CICA). The president formally introduced the so-called ‘New Asian Security Concept’, which he positioned at the center of the Chinese vision on security in the international realm (FMRPC, 2014c). This New Asian Security Concept describes the way China perceives its own role as an international security actor. While the president introduced the latest version, the ‘original’ New Security Concept actually has a long and prominent history in Chinese foreign policy thinking. The security framework that the President unveiled is comprised of four different elements: common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. At the core of the concept are the thoughts that security should be promoted through mutually beneficial cooperation and that economic development is the key to long-lasting security. It also entails a strong emphasis on respect for countries’ sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.² This New Asian Security Concept has a prescriptive bearing, since it describes how Beijing believes that countries should behave in international relations to uphold and improve international security. Foreign critics however, argued that the New Asian Security Concept was not so much an innovative concept for a new security architecture, but mainly strategic rhetoric aimed to challenge the U.S.’ position and its alliances in Asia (Ruwitch, 2014). In addition, doubts were issued about the question how strongly China committed itself is to the principles espoused in the President’s address (Wuthnow, 2014). Afghanistan’s then-President Karzai was far more optimistic when he stated the following at the same CICA Summit:

“Afghanistan wholeheartedly supports the New Asian Security Concept presented by President Xi Jinping and commit to its principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination among the countries of Asia. China’s leadership in advancing this comprehensive security vision for Asia is highly commendable and can greatly contribute to continental and global peace and security”(Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2014).

With Xi Jinping clearly stating his commitment to his new security strategy and Afghanistan welcoming his blueprint, consensus as to the newly proposed course of action for China in Afghanistan seemed in place. Against the backdrop of criticisms about the practical relevance of the New Asian Security Concept, this thesis will address the question to what extent these words of intent were actually put in practice in post-2014 Afghanistan.

² These elements will be discussed in detail in Chapter II
1.4 Research Question

President Xi Jinping’s introduction of the New Asian Security Concept in May 2014 provided a framework through which to understand China’s view of its role as an international security actor. When analyzing the different elements of Xi Jinping’s security vision, a blueprint of principles for nations on how to behave in the international security arena can be derived. The main purpose of this research is to find out to what extent China is putting the principles of this concept into practice in Afghanistan. In order to evaluate how China upholds its own standards in Afghanistan, the principles of the New Asian Security Concept will be converted into operational indicators that will help answer the following research question:

To what extent does China apply the principles of the New Asian Security Concept to post-2014 Afghanistan?

This thesis entails an analysis of China’s involvement in post-2014 Afghanistan in relation to the New Asian Security Concept. The purpose of this thesis is to add to our knowledge about China’s role in international security in two ways: 1) through the main research question, the findings of this thesis will provide insights into our understanding of the specific role of China in the stability and security of Afghanistan, and 2) this research will contribute our knowledge about the New Asian Security Concept.

1.5 Relevance

It was right after the announcement of the withdrawal of western troops that more academic attention went out to the possibility of an enhanced role of China in post-2014 Afghanistan. There have been a number of studies that addressed the question of what China could, and would be willing to do in post-2014 Afghanistan. At that time, there were little concrete changes to be observed and therefore, these studies were mostly hypothetical. Currently, over two years have passed and by now, there is more data that can be analyzed to bring to light which direction China’s policy towards Afghanistan has actually taken. In a certain sense, this research is a follow-up to these previous studies, with a focus on what Beijing has actually done in the past few years.

Another type of theoretical relevance is derived from the fact that this research focuses on China’s behavior as an international security actor in the specific case of Afghanistan. When it comes to China’s security behavior in international relations, this is most often discussed within the framework of tensions in South and East Asia. The forerunner of Xi Jinping’s version, the ‘New Security Concept’ was for example described as ‘intended to replace the current US-led bilateral security alliance structure of the Asia-Pacific region’ (Swaine & Ashley, 2000:118). This is a consequence of the fact that China is often considered

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to be at the core of East Asian, and not Central Asian security complexes (Buzan & Waever, 2003:164). In addition, with regards to China’s role in international peace affairs, it is mostly China’s presence in (post)-conflict states in Africa that has sparked debates among analysts.5 These studies are often focused on the differences between the Western and Chinese approaches to peace and security issues on that continent. Overall, there have been far less studies that entail similar researches into China’s security behavior in the region of Central Asia and specifically Afghanistan (Blanks, 2011: 261).

Finally, this research entails an approach that aims to evaluate the practical relevance of the New Asian Security Concept in the specific case of Afghanistan. Examining to what extent China puts these principles into action, will provide another addition to our understanding of its international role. Thus far, this specific approach has not yet been applied in any study.

Summing up, the theoretical relevance of this research is a result of several gaps in the existing literature. To begin with, it will be an addition to the academic knowledge about China’s involvement in Afghanistan, by focusing on the period after 2014, which has not yet been subject to thorough examinations. In addition, the examination of China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan will contribute to the existing literature on China’s role in international security, because the majority of the available research is focused on China’s role in other parts of Asia or Africa. Moreover, the exact approach that is used to examine this role, namely by examining the practical relevance of the New Asian Security Concept in Afghanistan, is a new modus operandi within the existing literature on this topic.

It is exactly this contribution to our knowledge about China’s international security behavior that underscores the societal relevance of this research. In the first place, this is of much relevance to Afghanistan, mostly because the security situation is not improving, but rather deteriorating. With a decreasing western footprint and severe concerns about the capabilities of the Afghan Security Forces, it is of much importance to examine to what extent other countries, and China specifically, are willing to assist in Afghanistan’s stability. This thesis helps us deepen our understanding of the role of China in Afghanistan’s security and the level of commitment that Beijing is willing to make. In addition, the examination of China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan might shed a light upon Beijing’s (future) role in other international security issues and troubled countries. This research will thus contribute to our knowledge about China’s international security theoretical thinking, the policies that are formulated, the actual behavior that follows and the underlying motivations. Especially when considering China’s growing global importance, this addition to our understanding of China’s evolving security role in international relations is of much societal value.

1.6 Reading Guide

In Chapter II, the theoretical framework, which is centered around the ‘New Asian Security Concept’, will be addressed. Its historical origin, evolvement and place within theoretical discussions about China’s role in international security will be discussed. With this framework in place, Chapter III concerns the methodological approach of this research. The research itself will start in Chapter IV with an overview of motivational factors that underlie China’s stance towards Afghanistan. In chapter V-IX, Chinese behavior in relation to the different elements of the New Security Concept will be examined and analyzed. Finally, Chapter IX entails the conclusion of this research and Chapter X incorporates a discussion of these findings and the applied research methods.
Chapter II: Theoretical Framework - The New Asian Security Concept

In this Chapter, a theoretical examination will be provided of China’s role in international security, with a focus on the New Asian Security Concept. This concept is a direct successor of the New Security Concept, which has a long history and is closely intertwined with other theoretical notions in China’s security and foreign policy-thinking. After the Cold War, Chinese security- and foreign policies have undergone important changes, and several of these developments are essential to understand the contemporary vision. Because of China’s general evolvement as a powerful actor in the arena of global politics, discussions also erupted internationally on how to interpret the role of China in international security. In that regard, most important is the debate between proponents of ‘China’s peaceful development’ and supporters of the ‘China threat theory’. This is of much relevance because as will be shown, the interpretation of the New Asian Security Concept is largely determined by one’s position in this debate. In addition, there are theoretical reflections about China’s role in international ‘peace-building’ that are equally relevant to this research. The difference between Chinese and western approaches is discussed, and the New Asian Security Concept is put into that context.

2.1 The origins of the New Asian Security Concept

In order to get a solid understanding of the New Asian Security Concept, a number of core concepts related to the evolution of Chinese foreign and security policies must be discussed. This start with its direct forerunner: the New Security Concept, which origins can be traced all the way back to a 1997 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), when the term was first introduced (Kumar, 2012:5). At the core of this new concept were the ‘Four No’s’: no hegemonies, no power politics, no alliances and no arms races (Yungling, 2010:52-53). It was issued to counter the so-called Cold War mentality, which was characterized by the bipolar rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. In that period, international security was being defined by dynamics that concerned the political and military balance between the West and East. In this new era, it was argued in China, security should be based on mutual trust and common interests and not such ‘zero-sum’ thinking (Kumar, 2012:4). This New Security Concept strongly resonated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that stem from a 1955 Treaty with India and Burma: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (FMPRC, n.d.)

Another important concept that was introduced right after the Cold War in the 1990s was the Chinese foreign policy mantra that became known as ‘Keeping a Low Profile’. Former Chinese statesman Deng Xiaoping is believed to have put forward the following sentence to describe Chinese foreign policy ambitions: ‘taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei’. This saying is freely translated as: ‘Bide our time and build up our capabilities, while trying to accomplish something’ (Chen, 2013: 175). This meant that China should remain a neutral international stature and not ‘stick its neck out’, but instead focus on domestic economic progress (Kallio, 2012:17). In other words, Beijing should avoid trouble and concentrate on creating a favorable external environment for economic development at home. This has for a long time
been seen as the foundation of China’s foreign relations. It was expressed in a continued strategy of relative restraint, low-profile and even reactive diplomacy, and an inward focus, with Chinese leaders primarily fixated on the problems of growth and stability at home (Gill, 2013:3). With regards to international security, China has therefore often been reluctant to take a tough position on key global issues in troubled countries such as North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and also: Afghanistan (Zhao, 2011: 5). From this perspective, China first objective is to maintain generally constructive and beneficial relations with partners abroad in order to more effectively deal with challenges at home.

In the early 2000s, debates over the early versions of the New Security Concept also put more emphasis on comprehensive security as a key defining feature of China’s security thinking (Ong, 2002: pg.18). Essentially, comprehensive security means that the Chinese concept of security is defined not only in military terms: the political and economic dimensions are just as much regarded as key components (Ong, 2007:12). This development can also be traced back to an article in a 1997 newspaper of the Chinese army. It listed not only military, political, economic, but also scientific, technological and social security as elements of this comprehensive security concept (Qingong & Wei, 1997:5 cited in Ong, 2002:188). Later on, non-traditional security threats, such as terrorism and transnational crime were also incorporated (Cooney &Sato, 2008: 76). One can see the similarities with the adoption of a broader definition of security that became increasingly widespread in International Relations theory. It was also around 1997-98 that under the lead of the so-called Copenhagen School, the pre-eminent focus on the military aspect of security was broadened to include new non-military threats. In Security: A New Framework for Analysis, theorists from that school Buzan, Waever and de Wilde argued that security can be separated into ‘sectors’, namely political, military, environmental, societal and economic (1997).

The themes of Comprehensive Security, Keeping a Low Profile, the Four ‘no’s’, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence where reiterated throughout China’s Defense White Papers of 1998 and 2000. In August 2002, the New Security Concept was officially coined through the releasing of the Position Paper on the New Security Concept during the ASEAN meeting in Brunei. This Paper stated the following:

“In China’s view, the core of such new security concept should include mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination’ and ‘The new security concept is, in essence, to rise above one-sided security and seek common security through mutually beneficial cooperation” (FMPRC, 2002).

This was the first time that the concept was officially elaborated upon and it emphasized several principles. To begin with, it promoted norms for international relations on the basis of the UN Charter and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It advocated to peacefully resolve disputes, to promote common prosperity, to place more emphasis on non-traditional security threats and to conduct effective disarmament.

Now that the New Security Concept had gained official status, it became closely tied to the Chinese foreign policy doctrine of the ‘Peaceful Rise’ which emphasized the idea of China’s rise to international prominence as a responsible, peaceable and nonthreatening global power
It was introduced by the influential Chinese intellectual and strategist Zheng Bijian in November 2003 and it entailed the vision that China would play a more active and useful role in the development, prosperity and stability of other Asian countries, its neighbors in particular. In 2004, Chinese leadership opted to not make use of the term ‘peaceful rise’ in public, since the use of the word ‘rise’ could be interpreted as a threat to the established world order. The term in that sense has long bitten the dust, and it was subtly replaced for the phrase that China is ‘committed to a path of peaceful development’. In 2005 for example, the Chinese government published an official White Paper under the title: China’s Peaceful Development Road. Ever since, China’s identity as a natural ‘peaceful power’ in international relations was heavily emphasized in policy documents (Summers, 2014: 21). In addition to ‘China’s peaceful development’ that was described in this official White Paper, a new ‘Harmonious World’ thought was put forward by then-President Hu Jintao at a 2005 UN special summit meeting. This new thinking called for China to build a harmonious world where states can be equal and have mutual trust, common security can be achieved, win-win cooperation leads to common prosperity and diversity of civilizations can be maintained (Zhimin, 2013:16). While new in name, the similarities with the earlier-mentioned Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence are obvious. Both the ideas of ‘China’s Peaceful Development’ as the ‘Harmonious World’ remained of significant influence in Chinese foreign policy for the years to come. In 2011 for example, the government once again published a White Paper on China’s peaceful development that entailed an elaborate part on China’s desire to promote the building of a harmonious world (FMPRC, 2011). Just like the other concepts before, the ideas of a ‘Harmonious World’ and the ‘Peaceful Development’ had their impact on the formation of the New Asian Security Concept as introduced by Xi Jinping just several years later in 2014.

### 2.2 The New Asian Security Concept

As illustrated above, the New Asian Security Concept has its origins in a number of different theoretical notions going back as far as the late 1990’s. Under the lead of China’s latest President Xi Jinping, adoption of the original New Security Concept in China’s foreign policies has been taken to a next level, in the form of the newly promoted New Asian Security Concept. As mentioned before, Xi Jinping introduced the New Asian Security Concept at a foreign ministers CICA meeting and stated that China is committed to the path of peaceful development and proposed to build an Asian ‘security mansion’ on a basis of cooperative, common, and sustainable security. Following up on that, President Xi Jinping elaborated on the four different elements.6

1. **Common Security** encompasses the view that the security architecture should include all Asian countries, both in terms of contributions to security as beneficiaries. Security of one country should not come at the expense of other countries and legitimate rights and interests should always be respected. From this perspective follows that the formation of alliances is not conducive to security. This part of the speech strongly

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6 The following description and discussion of the New Asian Security Concept is based on Xi Jinping’s speech at the CICA Summit : ‘New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation’, which can be found at [www.fmprc.gov.cn](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn)
echoed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, by emphasizing that security must universal, equal and inclusive:

“Countries should respect the basic norms governing international relations such as respecting sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, respect the social systems and development paths chosen by countries on their own, and fully respect and accommodate the legitimate security concerns of all parties”(FMPRC, 2014c).

2. With Comprehensive Security, Xi Jinping referred to the wide array of complex and growing security threats that Asia must challenge. These are both traditional and non-traditional threats like terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security and major natural disasters. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, the theme of comprehensive security is not a new phenomenon in Chinese security policies. The president did emphasize the need to give high priority to the more modern so-called ‘three forces’ or ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

3. The third element, Cooperative Security, addresses the need to promote peace and security through cooperation. This also means to abstain from selfish gains at the cost of others and to resolve disputes through peaceful means: regional security should be maintained through dialogue and cooperation. This part of the speech places much emphasis on the need ‘for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia’. While this could be interpreted as a warning to non-Asian actors to stop interfering with issues on the Asian continent, Xi Jinping somewhat contradictory also stressed the following:

“While enhancing their own cooperation with each other, countries in Asia must also firmly commit themselves to cooperation with countries in other parts of the world, other regions and international organizations. We welcome all parties to play a positive and constructive role in promoting Asia’s security and cooperation and work together to achieve win-win outcomes for all ” (FMPRC, 2014c).

4. Finally, Xi Jinping concluded with the need for Sustainable Security. The president accentuated the belief that economic development is the foundation of security, just as security is the precondition for development. He asserted that only improving people’s livelihoods and narrowing the wealth gap through economic cooperation and development can promote sustainable security. In his own words: ‘For most Asian countries, development means the greatest security and the master key to regional security issues.’ In comparison to the previous security concepts, the belief that development equals security was very pronounced.

In sum, it is clear that the New Asian Security Concept to a large extent restates some longstanding Chinese security principles. Especially the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Comprehensive Security and the principle of non-interference remain of much
importance in Xi Jinping’s contemporary security vision. Nonetheless, some aspects of the New Asian Security Concept do jump out in comparison to previous notions. Most significantly, the thought that development equals security is more vocally presented and emphasized. This is a bit reminiscent of Deng Xiaoping’s Keeping a Low Profile mantra, which advocated China to focus on its economic progress. More than before, Beijing now seems to promote a similar approach to achieve international stability. While this view has been present in previous foreign policies and thus not completely innovative, Xi Jinping’s speech more directly links it to the Chinese view of international security. In the words of a Chinese spectator: ‘There was a tendency to deal with security and the economy separately; now, they are becoming closely interwoven’ (Shaolei, 2014). Secondly, in terms of comprehensive security, the threat of the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism and extremism are heavily emphasized. A third observation that can be made is the tension between the focus on the need for Asian affairs to be ruled by Asians on the one hand, and the statements about the need to welcome all partners to contribute to Asia’s security. As will be shown in the following paragraph, it were exactly these modifications that have received the most international attention and critique.

During his speech, Xi Jinping made his intentions to put the New Asian Security Concept into practice very clear and reiterated that China aims to apply this security concept. Since this meeting in 2014, the New Asian Security Concept has been emphasized on numerous occasions in China’s foreign relations. In April 2015, the Chinese ambassador to India emphasized the concept as well: “Mankind needs to build a new, common, comprehensive and cooperative security outlook which has sustainable security at its core and which is based on the spirit of mutual respect, equal negotiation, transparency and win-win cooperation because all of us are travelling in the same boat” (Ministry of Defense of the Peoples Republic of China, 2015).

Late September 2015, Xi Jinping addressed the United Nations General Assembly and called for a ‘New Type of International Relations’ that should be based on practical win-win cooperation. This speech also strongly resonated the principles of the New Asian Security Concept and he even specifically mentioned the four different elements: ‘We should abandon Cold War mentality in all its manifestation, and foster a new vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security’ (FMPRC, 2016). In sum, Chinese leadership repeatedly outlines China’s determination to put the New Asian Security Concept at the core of its foreign policies.

2.3 International Criticism of the New Asian Security Concept

As mentioned before, international critics have stated that Xi Jinping’s speech was not much more than a direct challenge to the American presence and influence in Asian security affairs. It was for example argued that the New Asian Security Concept was mainly ‘an effort to redefine the United States as an over-assertive outsider that threatens to undermine regional security’ (Cohen, 2014). While there were no direct formulations that suggested Beijing’s desire for a U.S. exit out of Asia, specific parts of the speech were interpreted as challenges to the legitimacy of the role of the U.S. on that continent. Especially the part in which the
The president highlighted the need for Asian security affairs to be dealt with by ‘the people of Asia’ was perceived as an oblique reference to the U.S. presence in Asia (Suryanarayana, 2016: 173). The same holds up for Xi Jinping’s criticism of the formation of ‘Cold-War’ like alliances in Asia, which was perceived to directly refer to the strengthening bilateral US-Japan alliance (Goodwin, 2014). In addition, it was argued that even as China continues to denounce hegemony rhetorically, the very content of the New Asian Security Concept is “transparently hegemonic”, since its primary goal is to realize a U.S.-free Asia (Tiezzi, 2014). Another part of Xi Jinping’s address that has garnered international attention is the emphasis on economic progress and development as the core ingredient to security. This led to the argument that the main message of the New Asian Security Concept was that the ‘zero-sum’ understanding of security should make place for a more positive story of security that highlights economic progress as a key to security, thereby once again highlighting China’s importance. The ‘old’ security view that encourages China’s neighbors to focus on security disputes, should make place for an economy-integrated view of security that arguably renders China as the most significant security provider in Asia (Cohen, 2014). The unifying theme in all these perspectives is that the New Asian Security Concept is not as much a credible blueprint for a new security order, but rather a strategic speech full of geopolitical rhetoric (Wuthnow, 2014). Its primary goal would be to rebuke the security role of the U.S. in Asia, while framing the role of China in security issues in a bright spotlight. Interestingly, similar comments were made earlier in the 2000s with reference to the New Security Concept, which was described as a rhetorical ‘eyewash in order to divert anti-China feelings’ (Umar, 2012:12).

When reviewing remarks on the Xi Jinping’s speech by Chinese analysts from the China Institute of International Studies, it appears that assumptions that geostrategic considerations underlie the New Asian Security Concept might not be fully unfounded:

“The U.S. runs against the current of the times and continues to enlarge the alliance system and form clique, with a hope of bringing in more countries to its wings in forming a so-called “encirclement ring” aimed at containing and deterring China” (Zhida, 2014).

However, several Chinese think-tank strategists argue that this does not mean that China seeks to become a power hegemony itself and does definitely not mean to edge out America. Instead they argue that Beijing simply wants to move away from Cold-War power politics and enter a new security era that is defined by multilateral cooperation, which does not exclude close cooperation with the U.S. (Tuazon, 2014). An important difference between these Chinese and western interpretations is thus that while geostrategic concerns might have weighed in on the formulation of the concept, these considerations are either perceived to be of defensive or offensive nature. However, dr. B. Gill underscores that there is room for a more nuanced interpretation of the concept. He argues that while there is certainly a geostrategic element, he would not necessarily frame this as being directly aimed at America. Instead, he thinks it is part of Xi Jinping’s larger vision on restoring the centrality of China in Asia (Interview R3, Q3).
2.4 The China Threat Theory

The skeptical reception of the New Asian Security Concept in foreign media comes forth from long-lasting concerns about China’s growing status as an international power on the world stage. Over the past few decades, China’s economic and military strength has grown not only in relation to its neighboring countries but also in comparison to other major powers such as the EU, the USA and Russia. Since the 2000s, China has ‘gone global’ with growing interests in every corner of the world, as David Shambaugh’s argues in his latest book (2013). This development has led to different interpretations about what the consequences of this ‘rise of China’ are for the Asian region and the international order, also in terms of international security matters. This debate is mostly dominated by the question whether China’s rise and China’s international role should be characterized as either ‘peaceful’, ‘assertive’ or even ‘aggressive’ (Summers, 2014). The Beijing-backed stance of the peaceful development of China has already been described, but the debate in international circles tends to be more skeptical. These discussions have been going on for years and there is still no simple consensus in the existing literature.

John Mearsheimer for example, simply refuses to believe that China’s rise can occur in a peaceful fashion, he instead predicts inevitable conflict. Advocating (offensive) realist interpretations of international relations, Mearsheimer argues that great powers do not only strive to be the strongest great power, but that their ultimate aim is to become the only great power in the system (2006). He believes that China will look to push the United States out of Asia and try to maximize the power gap between itself and neighboring countries. Beijing will therefore try to suppress the growth of other regional powers and try to dictate the boundaries of acceptable behavior of those nations (2010: 383). This ‘China Threat’ argument maintains that an increasingly powerful China should be expected to destabilize the Asian region and should even be perceived as a security threat to existing global order, as Denny Roy puts it (1996:758). Proponents of this view argue that China is becoming increasingly confident in its ability to ‘deal with the West’ and they suggest that China implements a conscious strategy to enhance their power relative to other regional powers and the U.S. (Summers, 2014:18). These scholars often refer to the maritime and territorial conflicts with Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam in the South and East Chinese seas (Stevens, 2014:24). Michael Swaine and M. T. Fravel define these challenges to the status quo in maritime Asia as an ‘assertiveness’ that directly undermines Asian stability (2011:2). These conflicts supposedly illustrate a ‘new assertiveness’ of the People’s Republic of China that reflects a fundamental shift away from Beijing’s more status quo-oriented behavior of the previous thirty years (Johnston, 2013:7). It is said to be especially in 2010 that China displayed a willingness to act in ways that unsettled its neighbors and fueled regional strategic uncertainty (Besley, 2011: 62). The recent intensification of tensions in the South China Sea, where China refuses to accept an International Arbitration Court ruling about Chinese territorial claims, adds fuel to this debate (Fangyin, 2016:883). In the eyes of these commentators, the assertiveness attributed to China is not of the benign variety but instead involves a high-handed, often aggressive approach (Jerdén, 2014: 48). From their perspective, the ‘New Concept of Security’ that was emphasized in the early 2000s was primarily offered to the region as a part of larger diplomatic effort to counter this so-called ‘China threat theory’ (Kumar, 2012: 7).
It should be clearly stated however, that this is not a unanimously shared opinion amongst Western scholars. Some scholars believe that this so-called assertive shift was not far-reaching or fundamental at all, and that its ‘aggressive’ nature is overemphasized. A.I. Johnston for example, argues that there is a great degree of continuity in China’s behavior, also when taking the perceived ‘aggressive’ events in 2010 into consideration (2013). He provides substantial evidence demonstrating that the assumption of an ‘assertive’ foreign policy is more often than not wrong. In addition, M. Yahuda believes that China’s so-called ‘assertive’ behavior in the South Chinese Sea can be explained by external circumstances that stimulated China to do so, and it was thus not motivated by some fundamental policy shift (2013). In similar vein, T.J. Christensen argues that China’s policies towards its neighbors and the US are better understood as conservative and reactive than innovative and assertive (2011:54). B. Jerdén even argues that the ‘new assertiveness’ existed only as a social fact within the bounds of the inter-subjective knowledge of a particular discourse, and not as an objectively true phenomenon, and he tries to explain why so many scholars went along with the flawed idea (2014:87). Overall, this debate illustrates that the perception of the New Asian Security Concept in international relations is heavily influenced by one’s opinion about China’s role in international security.

2.5 The New Asian Security Concept and Peace-Building

The security framework that Xi Jinping introduced includes rules of guidance for countries, including China, on how to maintain and promote international security. Besides the general principles about how to maintain international security, there is also a significant overlap with these guidelines and peace-building. This is a result of the fact that a big part of the concept entails principles on how to promote security in other countries. While it goes beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed description of the range of theories and approaches to peace-building in post-conflict states such as Afghanistan, some insight on the diverging views between Chinese and western approaches is therefore relevant.

At first, it must be noted that Chinese officials are rather uncomfortable with the term peace-building, since this invokes thoughts of long-term foreign involvement that is aimed at the adjustment of the social, economic and political context in a third country (van der Putten,2014). It was already mentioned that when it comes to international interventions in conflict states, China historically has been reluctant to participate in such missions. The hesitance to refrain from the use of military resources is considered a direct result of China insisting on upholding the principle of non-interference. However, while the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterates that the principle is still firmly upheld, China has increased its footprint in UN-mandated missions throughout the late 2000s and especially in recent years (Chenchen, 2014). With Chinese leadership getting more involved with international security peacekeeping in for example Sudan and Syria, it was argued that China in reality has become more flexible with its stance on the principle of non-interference and even with regards to military involvement in other countries (Gu, 2014). Mr. Pantucci underlines that more involvement with UN-missions is indeed one of the signs that China is gradually, but steadily increasing its role in international security, which in a strict sense can be interpreted as a move away from the non-interference principle (Interview R2:Q2). Dr. van der Putten argues
that it is not necessarily the opposing views on national sovereignty and non-intervention that is the main obstacle to Sino-western cooperation in peace-building. Instead, he believes that it is Chinese resentment of the western practice of values promotion that restricts China’s willingness to closely align its policies with western approaches (2014). An official article on China’s peacekeeping-style on the China Military Online website indeed asserted that the Chinese model distances itself from the Western type of peace-building that views the reconstruction of national institutions, election and good governance as matters of priority (China Military Online, 2014). From the Chinese perspective, political democratic reform should be subordinated to national stability, especially since Beijing believes that hasty democratization is more likely to push countries into unpredictable turmoil (Xuejun, 2013). Instead, the Chinese belief is that stability should be promoted through socio-economic development, which is regarded as the most important precondition of sustainable internal peace (China Military Online, 2014). Also when it comes to this economic assistance, Beijing provides an alternative to the western-style, conditional support that is associated with the Washington Consensus. Instead, China prefers to offer aid, assistance and economic partnership to foreign states, with ‘no political strings’ attached (Aidoo & Hess, 2015: 108). Beijing prefers to put its political and economic resources in post-conflict countries into the direct reconstruction of infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and bridges. The western approach is anchored in the principles of liberal democracy and favors democratization and institution-building. In contrast to this western ‘liberal peace thesis’, Chinese Professor Wang Xuejun coins the term ‘sovereignty plus development model’ to describe the Chinese approach. China’s role in peace and security affairs is one that is focused on peace through development, while highlighting sovereignty and local ownership during this post-conflict reconstruction. Western countries in turn often criticize Beijing on its lack of efforts in the field of human rights and good governance, for example when China supports autocratic or dictatorial regimes, and fails to criticize integrity issues such as corruption. In addition, China’s enhanced security engagement in Africa has often been described by western academia and media as merely motivated by economic interests. Beijing is either driven by the desire to get access to the continent’s resources or to protect the significant investments it has already made (Musvanhirir & Lee, 2015). With criticisms going back and forth, it is clear that the main difference between the Western and Chinese peace building models is thus that the western view puts more emphasis on values like liberty and democracy as the preconditions for peace, while China insists that sustainable security can only be achieved through economic development. These observations are completely in line with the points of emphasis of the New Asian Security Concept. In short, the New Asian Security Concept also stresses that development is the greatest form of security and that countries should cooperate to promote this security while upholding the (Chinese) basic norms of governance like respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference.

7 For more elaborate discussions on this topic, see for example Regional Center for Strategic Studies (2014) and Duchâtel, M., Gowan, R. & Rapnouil, M.L. (2016)
2.6 Summary

This theoretical framework addressed the New Asian Security Concept as introduced by Xi Jinping in 2014. As illustrated in the first part of this chapter, the origin of the concept can be traced back to a number of transformations in Chinese foreign policy thinking from the post Cold-War era onward. The resemblance between the New Security Concept that was formulated in the 1990s and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence which were introduced in the 1950s illustrates the deep historical roots of the concept. Mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference and mutually beneficial cooperation have for a long time been regarded as the key to peaceful international relations. Starting with this New Security Concept, the Chinese security doctrines that followed demonstrate an interplay and overlap of notions like ‘keeping a low profile’, ‘comprehensive security’, ‘China’s peaceful development’ and ‘harmonious world’. All of these notions have had an undeniable influence on the development of the New Asian security Concept.

Xi Jinping’s security mantra is centered around the notions of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. It reiterates much of the well-known Chinese principles, but some parts of the framework do stand out in comparison to previous formulations. The interconnectedness between economic development and security is stronger emphasized than before, much attention goes out to the set of non-traditional threats of the ‘three evils’, and finally there is the somewhat contradictory stance on international cooperation in Asian security affairs that jumps out.

International critics argued that Xi Jinping’s speech was in the first place a direct objection to the security role of the U.S. in Asia. It was suggested that the New Asian Security Concept was in its essence not much more than a geostrategic message aimed to challenge America, rather than an actionable blueprint of principles that China truly wishes to uphold. This stance is directly related to discussions on how to interpret China’s evolution as an international power, with opinions ranging from the Beijing supported view of “China’s peaceful development” to the critical realist’s interpretations of the ‘China threat theory’.

Finally, it was also noted that when it comes to China’s role in Afghanistan as a (post) conflict state, there is an important difference between Sino-western approaches to ‘peace building’. Western involvement in third countries is often guided by the so-called ‘liberal peace theory’, which involves much emphasis on democratic value-promotion, for example through institution-building and electoral assistance. The Chinese approach on the other hand, gives prominence to economic development with ‘no political strings attached’ and an emphasis on other countries’ sovereignty.

In sum, these theoretical considerations underscore that the New Asian Security Concept is a broad concept that incorporates both principles on international behavior aimed to maintain security, while it simultaneously involves guidelines on how to actively promote security. Because of the comprehensiveness of this concept, it serves as a solid springboard for both theoretical reflections about Chinese international security role from political perspectives, as well as reflections about the Chinese approach to peace-building. With Chinese leadership stating their commitment to the New Asian Security Concept, this research will examine how
China’s policy and behavior in post-2014 Afghanistan matches the principles of this concept. This examination of the practical relevance of the concept will be able to add insights to the debate about China’s role in international security, also by reflecting on how these findings relate to the peaceful development/china threat dichotomy and the thoughts about China’s preferred ‘peace-building’ approach.
Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As illustrated in the introduction of this thesis, this research entails an analysis of Chinese involvement in post-2014 Afghanistan’s security in relation to the New Asian Security Concept. The research is guided by the following question:

*To what extent does China apply the principles of the New Asian Security Concept to post-2014 Afghanistan?*

While this might seem like a relatively clear and unambiguous approach, there are some methodological caveats to overcome. To begin with, the New Asian Security Concept is in its essence a set of, in some case even vague, but often abstract principles. In order to make this framework suitable for research, these principles must first be converted to practical guidelines and a set of indicators that can actually be observed in reality. In addition, while the New Asian Security Concept will be used to examine China’s policy in Afghanistan, the framework also entails parts that are not so much concerned with bilateral relations, but more with an international ‘architecture’. This renders some parts of the New Asian Security Concept less applicable to this specific research. In order to maintain the transparency of the utilized approach, it is therefore of much importance to clarify and justify the exact application of the theoretical framework in this case-study. In the following chapter, a description of the chosen methodology will be presented and accounted for by explaining operational choices made. This includes an oversight of the type of research design that is applied, the conceptual framework, the methods of data collection and the limitations of the research.

3.2 Research Design

The research question illustrates that the chosen approach of this research is a single-case study (Yin, 2009: 47-50). It assesses China’s role as an international security actor in relation to the New Asian Security Concept in the specific case of post-2014 Afghanistan. With China’s conduct being the unit of analysis, the research is spatially limited to Afghanistan and temporally bounded to the period 2014-to date. The emphasis lays on developments in the security relation between China and Afghanistan in the period 2014-to date, because it was in early 2014 that Xi Jinping introduced the New Asian Security Concept. A secondary motivation for this choice of timeframe is the fact that that year also marked a significant shift in the security landscape of Afghanistan due to the reduced presence of western troops. However, in order to be able to put these post-2014 developments into context and give them empirical significance, it is often necessary to provide a comparative element. This can for example be done by outlining Chinese policies and behavior before 2014, or by portraying contrasts with other countries. Another point that must be made is that this research encompasses a mixture between a descriptive and normative approach. The research will entail a descriptive analysis by giving an in-depth examination of the developments in China’s role in post-2014 Afghanistan’s security, thereby filling a knowledge gap in the current academic literature. In addition, this research is normative to some extent, since it assesses
whether China’s conduct in Afghanistan meets certain standards, namely its own formulated principles regarding international security that are embodied in the New Asian Security Context.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual approach encompasses the New Asian Security Concept as a methodological tool to examine China’s security role in post-2014 Afghanistan. This research follows the version of the ‘New Asian Security Concept’ as described by Xi Jinping at the 4th CICA meeting. In this paragraph, an effort will be made to convert the elements of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security into actionable guidelines. This will result in a framework with a set of indicators per conceptual element.

1 - Common Security

The first part of the New Asian Security Concept concerns ‘common security’. This part emphasizes the move away from the ‘Cold-War mentality’ in security affairs. An important aspect is the notion that no country should seek its own absolute security at the expense of other countries, for example by beefing up military alliances. Of even more relevance is the part that emphasizes that nations must have respect for other countries legitimate rights, interests and sovereignty. Resonating the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the non-interference principle, this element highlights that countries should refrain from interfering in other nation’s internal affairs and respect their independence and territorial integrity. In the case of China’s conduct in Afghanistan, this leads to the following indicators:

1) **China does not interfere with internal political affairs**: from the perspective of the non-interference principle, this means that China will refrain from intermingling with political issues that are considered domestic affairs.

2) **China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity**: the principle of territorial integrity is included and described in the United Nations Charter Article 2 (4). In the most intrusive manner, such territorial integrity can be violated through the forceful introduction of border changes, but the promotion of secessionist movements can also be considered as a violation. Xi Jinping however frames separatism as one of the ‘three evils’, and shares this under comprehensive security. The indicator of territorial integrity will therefore be focused on the actual border-related issues.

3) **China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close coordination with the Afghan government in full respect of its sovereignty**: out of respect for the sovereignty of the Afghan government that is seated in Kabul, China must make sure that there are no steps undertaken that could be interpreted as undermining that sovereignty, which prescribes close communication and consultation with that regime at all times.

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It should be noted that the part in the speech about the formation of military alliances is not converted into an indicator. This is mainly because this is an aspect of Xi Jinping’s vision on a broader regional or international security architecture, and is thus not so much related to bilateral security relations. In addition, the question whether China is forming alliances against Afghanistan is not of much practical relevance when taking into consideration Afghanistan’s irrelevance as an actor in international relations. It could be argued that it is possible to analyze whether or not China is forging military partnerships in Afghanistan that could be perceived as alliances aimed at other countries. In that regard however, there is an obvious overlap with ‘cooperative security’, which prescribes the exact opposite of the formation of alliances, namely equal and inclusive multilateral cooperation. Therefore, instead of examining whether China forms alliances in, or aimed against, Afghanistan this part of the equation will be discussed in ‘cooperative security’ by examining to what extent China is truly willing to cooperate with all other countries.

In addition, it should be noted that indicators 1 (China does not interfere with internal political affairs) and 3 (China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close coordination with the Afghan government in full respect of its sovereignty) are closely connected. This is mainly due to the term ‘interfere’, which could either be interpreted as any sort of, or specifically an unwelcomed form of involvement of a foreign actor in domestic affairs. A strict interpretation of the non-interference principle would be that China does not get engaged with domestic affairs at all. However, it is also be possible to argue that involvement with internal political affairs does not necessarily result in a violation of this principle, provided that the central government clearly welcomes this participation. In other words, full respect for Afghanistan’s sovereignty is a key variable in the evaluation whether China’s involvement in Afghanistan can be interpreted as interference.

A final observation is that the element of common security is mostly about non-actions and the absence of conduct that could come at the expense of another country’s security. While this element thus stresses the need to refrain from conduct that could have a negative impact on another country’s stability, the following three elements on the other hand mostly emphasize positive contributions to that security.

2 - Comprehensive Security

The element of ‘comprehensive security’ relates to efforts to uphold and promote security in both traditional and non-traditional fields. It advocates a holistic approach that does not merely focus on traditional security threats. Security challenges such as terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security and major natural disasters are to be addressed. Xi Jinping presses for enhanced regional cooperation on such matters and specifically emphasizes the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, extremism and separatism. As such, the following guidelines for China’s conduct in Afghanistan were abstracted as indicators:

1) China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently: in the first place, China can help Afghanistan address its main security threats through direct assistance to the Afghan security forces, which can for example occur through aid packages or training programs. It would of course
be possible to examine how China helps Afghanistan combat all of the abovementioned threats of terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security and natural disasters. However, not all of them might be equally relevant to the case of post-2014 Afghanistan and Chapter VII will therefore begin with an examination of the main security threats to the country.

2) China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges: this involves an emphasis on actual cooperation in the field of security, which means that this also entails a focus the security threats that China and Afghanistan share.

3 - Cooperative security

With a focus on the common security interests of all countries, this element advocates to address security challenges through cooperation. In addition, no country should seek to selfish gains at the expense of other countries’ security, and tensions between countries are to be de-escalated and resolved through peaceful means and dialogue: the use of force should in all cases be discouraged. Interestingly, Xi Jinping on the one hand stresses that it is “for the people of Asia to solve their own security problems” but also accentuates that they “welcome all parties to play a positive and constructive role in promoting Asia’s security”. From this analysis, the following guidelines for China’s role in Afghanistan can be abstracted:

1) China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security: This principle is directly translatable to Afghanistan, a country that is in desperate need of international security support. The question is whether Beijing welcomes all parties to contribute to Afghan security, maybe even promotes it, or in some cases maybe challenges it. Any objections to the security involvement of another country in Afghanistan, for example motivated by geopolitical arguments, can be interpreted as a selfish gain at the expense of Afghanistan. An important side-note is that Xi Jinping specifically says ‘constructive role’, which means that Beijing could possibly object to another country’s role in Afghanistan by framing it as not being constructive.

2) China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability: in order to make sure that China’s willingness to welcome other countries in Afghanistan is not merely rhetoric, the actual level of cooperation will be examined. There is a big difference between not objecting other countries roles in Afghan security, and actual bilateral cooperation on these matters. It should be noted that cooperation is the result of intentions from both sides, which means that China’s will to cooperate does not necessarily have to result in practical manifestations of that intent.

3) China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s main security challenges through (regional) multilateral efforts: besides bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan and other countries, there is also the possibility to contribute to Afghan security through initiatives and organizations that involve a number of countries. An active role
of China in these efforts will underscore its willingness to cooperate on Afghan security matters. This part will involve an analysis of China’s behavior in the most relevant multi-lateral initiatives to address Afghanistan main security threats, as described in Chapter VII.

4 - Sustainable security

The last element of the New Asian Security Concept emphasizes the notion that ‘development is the foundation of security’. Xi Jinping repeatedly stresses the relevance of this final aspect, and argues that sustainable development is the master key to regional security issues. Promoting common development of the region through economic cooperation is thus of utmost importance to make sure that security is of the durable kind. This leads to the following guidelines for China’s role in Afghanistan:

1) **China provides (socio)-economic assistance to Afghanistan:** this indicator stresses the Chinese efforts to promote sustainable development through economic support and assistance. This can for example be done through gross developmental aid, which can be seen as the most direct and unselfish form of assistance. This can also involve other governmental initiatives or projects that are aimed to promote socio-economic development in Afghanistan.

2) **China strengthens its economic relationship with Afghanistan:** another way through which Beijing can promote Afghanistan’s economic independence is through the strengthening of its commercial relation with the country. Such economic cooperation can involve import-export, but also investments in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that there might be an overlap between these two indicators and that they can also go hand in hand. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish how to classify certain findings. The exact intentions and future impact of economic investments or aid packages cannot always be distinguished. While acknowledging this shortcoming, the purpose of the use of these two different indicators is to emphasize a difference between economic support on the one hand, and economic cooperation on the other. The first is foremost aimed to solely assist Afghanistan, while the second type involves more emphasis on win-win cooperation.

An argument that can be made in relation to all four elements of the New Asian Security Concept is that any contribution that China makes to regional security, or lack thereof, can also have an impact on the situation of Afghanistan. This can occur through cooperation with the countries surrounding Afghanistan to uphold their stability, broader Chinese efforts to accomplish regional economic progress, and China’s efforts to promote regional security. In a very strict sense, it would therefore be necessary to examine China’s security behavior in all of Central-Asia since this can all benefit or be of disadvantage to Afghan stability. In terms of feasibility, it goes beyond the practical scope of this research to take this entire regional dimension under consideration, but there are some comforting side-notes. To begin with, it is very difficult to establish and evaluate a link of causality between China’s bilateral relations with other regional countries and Afghan stability, both in terms of economic and security
assistance to those surrounding nations. In addition, by examining China’s role in regional efforts that are directly tied to Afghanistan’s security, an effort is made to incorporate the biggest part of this regional aspect into the analysis. Another side-note that must be made is that there is a significant degree of overlap between the different elements and the conceptual boundaries are not clear-cut. For example, if China works together with a number of countries to deal with one of Afghanistan’s main security threats, this can be analyzed both in relation to comprehensive security and cooperative security. As a result of this conceptual overlap, it is perfectly possible that specific actions of China in Afghanistan can be linked to multiple of these actionable guidelines. This does however not lead to different interpretations, and it is therefore not necessarily a limitation of this approach. Examination of the abovementioned guidelines can provide a reliable indication of the convergence between China’s actual conduct in Afghanistan and the principles of the New Asian Security Concept. The methodological framework is presented in its totality in the table below:

**Table 1: Indicators of the New Asian Security Concept**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Element</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Security</td>
<td>1. China does not interfere with Afghanistan’s internal political affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close consultation with the Afghan government, in full respect of its sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Security</td>
<td>4. China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Security</td>
<td>6. China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s security challenges through multilateral (regional) efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Security</td>
<td>9. China provides Afghanistan with (socio)-economic assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. China strengthens its economic ties with Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this set of 10 indicators, a framework is in place that can be used to evaluate China’s behavior in post-2014 Afghanistan in relation to the principles of the New Asian Security Concept. To enable an actually assessment of China’s conduct, a method is used that will
assign scores per indicator. At the end of every chapter that describes Beijing’s policy in relation to one specific element of the concept, an overview of Chinese concrete (non)actions per indicator of that conceptual element will be provided. These (non)-actions will in turn be converted into a ‘score’ that resembles the alignment of China’s actual conduct with that specific principle. As mentioned earlier, a comparative element might often prove a necessary insight to come to a conclusive assessment of post-2014 developments. These ‘scores’ are scaled in a spectrum that ranges from - - to + +, as presented below:

Table 2: Scoring Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Specification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>Findings suggest strong indications that China applies the principle in post-2014 Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Findings suggest some indications that China applies the principle in post-2014 Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Findings suggest no significant indications that China does or does not apply the principle in post-2014 Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Findings suggest some indications that China does not apply the principle in post-2014 Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- -</td>
<td>Findings suggest strong indications that China does not apply the principle in post-2014 Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Data Collection

In order to evaluate China’s conduct in Afghanistan in terms of security, this research will entail a detailed description of developments in China-Afghanistan relations since 2014. To achieve this in a thorough manner, multiple types of sources will be utilized. The approach of triangulation will be applied to overcome validity-related caveats while researching: the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a phenomenon to ensure that findings can be cross-checked (Bryman, 2012: 716). An overview of the type of sources used is presented in the table below and elaborated upon in the rest of this paragraph. It incorporates the data analysis of primary and secondary sources, in addition to which interviews with experts have been conducted.

Table 3: Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sources</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Primary Sources | • News papers and websites.  
                  | • Official governmental documents  
<pre><code>              | • Reports from non-governmental or international |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Secondary Sources** | • Academic analyses and articles  
                      | • Reports from think-tanks  
                      | • Analyses on international-relations–oriented websites |
| **Interviews**     | • Semi-structured interviews with experts                        |

### 1. Primary Sources

Primary sources are documents or records that contain first-hand information or original data on a topic (Tosh, 2011:91-93). In relation to this research, the main sources are:

1) *Newspaper and websites*: these include for example Xinhua News, People’s Daily, Afghanistan Times, the Daily Outlook Afghanistan, and the Kabul Times but also reports from Reuters and other international news agencies.

2) *Official governmental information*: this is probably the most important type of sources in this research: a vast amount of official information from the People’s Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been included in the analysis. Examples are China’s official ‘White Papers’, updates and statements from a number of different Ministries from both countries, and finally information from other governments has provided useful information.

3) *Official information from non-governmental (international) organizations*: there are a number of organizations that are directly involved with the topic of research, such as the United Nations (UN), the ‘Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process’, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), to name a few. Reports from these organizations often provide first-hand accounts of events that are relevant to this research.

An important limitation to the use of the above-listed primary sources is the credibility of these reports and documents. Since this research to a large extent depends on the examination of occurrences and developments in Sino-Afghan relationships over the past few years, it is important that these findings are as factual and unbiased as can be. Quite problematic is that, especially in China, media regulation by the government is high. Several news agencies such as the Xinhua News Agency and The People’s Daily are state-owned and foreign correspondents are for example required to obtain permission before reporting (Beina, 2015). This is an important consideration to keep in mind, especially when information of such news articles entails subjective information. In such cases, an attempt will be made to verify the information, and if this cannot be provided, a critical side-note on the credibility will be provided.
2. Secondary Sources

The term secondary sources is usually meant to describe data that already includes a level of analysis by someone else (Bryman, 2012:13). Once again, there are a number of different types of secondary sources that have been used in this research:

1) *Academic articles*: these include a wide range of articles from both western and Chinese journals such as the Journal of Contemporary China, the Chinese Journal of International Politics, Asian Survey, etc.

2) *Think-tank reports*: these include papers of analysis on subjects related to this research, from a number of western and Chinese institutions and organizations, such as China-US Focus, RAND, Afghan Analysts Network, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Clingendael, etc.

3) *Analyses on international relations–oriented websites*: these include websites such as The Diplomat, Council of Foreign Relations, Foreign Affairs, World Politics Review, etc.

3. Interviews

The final method of analysis concerns semi-structured interviews with experts on the research topic. The entire transcriptions of these interviews can be found in the Appendices 1, 2 and 3. Three interviews have been conducted with the following scholars:

1 – *Rafaello Pantucci (Royal United Services Institute: International Security Studies)*

Mr. Pantucci is Director of International Security Studies at the London-based think-tank Royal United Services Institute for Defence & Security Studies (RUSI). His research primarily focuses on China’s role in Central-Asia and counter-terrorism. At the moment, he is completing a research project that examines Chinese interests in Central Asia. As a result, he has conducted a significant amount of research in to China’s role in Afghanistan.

2- *Dr. Bates Gill (Australian National University: Asia-Pacific Strategic Studies)*

Dr. Gill, currently Professor of Asia-Pacific Strategic Studies at the Australian National University is an internationally recognized expert on Chinese foreign policy and U.S.- China relations. He has a long record of research on China: he has (co)authored over 100 China-related articles and published seven books that are directly related to China’s behavior in relation to international and regional security issues, such as *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy* (2007).

3- *Dr. Frans-Paul van der Putten (Clingendael Netherlands Institute of Foreign Relations)*

Dr. van der Putten is a Senior Research Fellow at Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of Foreign Relations. His research focuses on international security issues and on the
consequences of the rise of China as a major power. Relevant topics in this context include China’s security relations with Europe and the United States, with neighboring countries in Asia, and with the developing world, as well as the political implications of Chinese direct investments abroad.

It must be noted that attempts have been made to add insights of more experts in the field of Sino-Afghan relations into the research. Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund Andrew Small, Dirk van der Kley of the Lowy Institute for International Relations, dr. Rubin Barnett from the Center on International Cooperation and professor Zhao Huasheng, Director at the Center for Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies have all been contacted to participate in this research, but unfortunately to less avail. In addition, it was the intent to incorporate an interview with a Chinese expert into the thesis, but with the exception of prof. Huasheng, it was difficult to find more Chinese specialists that might be willing to participate. However, the insights that were abstracted from the interviews with Mr. Pantucci, Dr. Gill and Dr. van der Putten were of much value to the research. The difference in their specializations also resulted in three different perspectives on China’s conduct in Afghanistan. Mr. Pantucci was able to provide many details about the exact role of China in Afghanistan, also in relation to the broader Central-Asian security context. Dr. van der Putten’s expertise on China’s role in peacekeeping and broader role in international security was of much added value. Finally, dr. Gill’s knowledge about China’s behavior in international relations, its foreign relations and the ‘rise of China’ provided much appreciated insights. Finally, all three respondents gave their permission to use their names and the full interviews after reading the transcriptions of the conversations.

3.5 Limitations

Some of the methodological limitations of the approach that has been applied in this research have already been discussed. In terms of validity of the findings, the fact that not every single aspect of China’s regional security behavior with a possible impact on stability on Afghanistan can and will be examined indicates the limits to the possibility to truly provide an all-encompassing analysis. Furthermore, the possible bias of Chinese sources is a point of attention that underscores the necessity to use more sources to validate findings. In addition, efforts have been made to include articles and reports from both western and Chinese authors and organizations, but an important and sometimes insuperable hurdle when it comes to the use of Chinese sources is the language barrier. While official governmental documents are mostly available in English, the same can unfortunately not be said about Chinese secondary analyses. The fact that the most important primary sources were consistently accessible in English is reassuring, but knowledge of the Chinese language would have probably led to more utilization of Chinese academic analyses in this research. A limitation in terms of reliability of the findings is the fact that China’s behavior in post-2014 Afghanistan is assessed through a scoring system, which will logically involve a level of subjective interpretation. It is of much importance to clearly provide and articulate solid arguments to come to a certain score per indicator. However, it is undeniable that it is possible for another researcher to apply the exact same research method, but come to somewhat different concluding evaluations. When it comes to the goal of this research to add to the knowledge
about China’s role as an international security actor, questions about the generalizability of the findings come to mind. This research concerns a single-case study, which always includes a restriction to the possibility to derive findings that can be generalized (Bryman, 2012:71). The aim is therefore not to generalize these findings, but to engage in theoretical discussions and theory-building through an extensive examination of this single case. As mentioned before, the case of post-2014 Afghanistan adds relevance to reflections about China’s security role, because this is most often discussed in relation to its behavior in other parts of the world, such as the security landscape of South and East Asia and Africa. It must be clearly stated that the purpose of this research is not to suggest that findings of this research will necessarily be representative of China’s role in international security, but rather to use this case-study as a springboard for theoretical reflections.
Chapter IV: Context – China’s Interests in Afghanistan

In this Chapter, a short summary will be provided of the motivations that underlie, or could underlie China’s engagement with Afghanistan. These can be divided into three broad categories: geopolitical motives, economic interests and security concerns.

4.1 Geopolitical Motives

China’s geopolitical considerations have already been discussed to some extent in the previous chapters, but they have also been directly tied to its behavior in Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares its borders with Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, China and Pakistan, and due to its central position between these countries it also referred to as a ‘land-bridge’ between South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia/Europe and the Middle East (Clarke, 2013:4). Partially as a result from this geostrategic position, the country has been invaded by a multitude of foreign forces throughout the ages, including Iran, Russia and of course most recently the United States. The fact that all of these great powers have tried and failed to colonize Afghanistan led to the moniker of Afghanistan as the ‘graveyard of empires’ (Boot, 2014). As a result, Afghanistan is often considered an arena for ‘great power competition’, where geopolitical rivalries amongst nations (such as the British Empire, Russia, China and the U.S) manifest themselves (Khan, 2015:1). Following that line of thought, it is argued that China’s role in Afghanistan is simply part of a greater ‘power game’ in the international arena. To begin with, there are arguments that China’s discomfort with a long-term western presence in its backyard plays a role (Sheikh, 2015). From that perspective, Beijing would desire a decrease in U.S and NATO footprint in Afghanistan, because it perceives its presence as efforts to wield control and authority over the region by ‘encircling’ China (Fazil, 2014:86). Others say that China main objective is to enhance its global stature as a triumphant alternative to the U.S, by looking to succeed where the Americans failed (Khan, 2015: 2). A former U.S diplomat reiterated this competitive element, by arguing that ‘They want to prove they can do it better’ (Page, 2015). Another interpretation is that not geostrategic rivalries, but a growing awareness of its responsibility as a regional power motivates China to promote security and development in Afghanistan (Zhao, 2015). From this point of view, it is argued that the country is simply trying to make clear to both friends and rivals that China will not sit on the sidelines and watch Afghanistan slide back into a civil war (Small, 2014:1). What sums these perspectives up is that they emphasize geopolitical considerations as motivation for China’s involvement in post-2014 Afghanistan. The exact way of expressing this view is again largely determined by one’s stance in the ‘peaceful development’ vs ‘china threat’ discussion. This shows much resemblance to the mixed international perception of the New Asian Security Concept as discussed in Chapter II.

4.2 Economic Interests

Afghanistan’s geographical position is not the only thing that has attracted foreign engagement with the country: the large amount of untapped natural resources is also alluring. While being one of the poorest countries on the earth, Afghanistan has an abundance of mineral resources and is literally sitting on a geological goldmine. According to estimations
by U.S. Geological Survey scientists, there is nearly $1 trillion worth of mineral deposits containing copper, iron, coal, oil, gas, gold, and the valuable rare earth elements such as lanthanum, cerium and neodymium (Choi, 2014). Several important Chinese investments have already been made to extract and exploit these natural riches. In addition, China has embarked on a huge commercial adventure in Central-Asia with the revival of the historical Silk Road. Part of this ambitious One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative is an economic land belt that connects China with countries in Central Asia, West-Asia, The Middle-East and Europe. China’s fear that unrest and instability in Afghanistan can wreak havoc on this OBOR project can thus serve as a stimulus for deeper engagement. This led voices in western circles to argue that China’s motivation to become engaged in Afghanistan is purely of economic nature. It has been argued that while the Western troops have fought the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other militants, China is looking to emerge as the true beneficiary (Khan, 2015:7). This stance is best put into words by the influential American political journalist Robert D. Kaplan: ‘The problem is that while America is sacrificing its blood and treasure, the Chinese will reap the benefits’ (Kaplan: 2009). On the other hand, it could also be interpreted as a signal that China is prepared to participate in Afghanistan’s economic reconstruction, while simultaneously benefiting Chinese foreign economic interests (Zhao, 2014:5). In addition, Mr. Pantucci points out that while China is surely interested in Afghanistan’s resources, this is largely a question of what China needs and at what time. At the moment for example, both copper and energy prices are relatively low (Interview R2:Q3). In addition, previous big investments of China in Afghanistan to help extract minerals have had very limited success, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter VIII.

4.3 Security Concerns

There is also a direct security link between Afghanistan and China. The two countries share a border at the end of the so-called Wakhan Corridor: a narrow strip of mountainous territory in the Northeastern part of Afghanistan (Ludwig, 2013: 392). With this small frontier, Afghanistan borders the enormous western Chinese region of Xinjiang. Geographically speaking, Xinjiang is a component of Central Asia and historically, the region represented a source of anxiety for Chinese emperors as it often posed security problems for the central government (Ong, 2005: 426). Described by the Chinese government as ‘an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation’, the region of Xinjiang has fought for and even enjoyed varying degrees of independence (Information Office of the State Council, 2003). Separatists in Xinjiang declared independence in October 1933 and established the Islamic Republic of East Turkistan, which was however reclaimed by China just a year later. In the year 1944, a Second East Turkistan Republic was created, but this was also a short-lasting stint: in 1949 the region was once again reabsorbed by the Chinese army (Bhattacharji, 2012). This region has been referred to as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) since 1955, in recognition of the fact that a large portion of the inhabitants of the region are of a particular ethnic minority. These Uyghurs are the largest minority group of China and are predominantly Muslims of Turkic origin, sharing strong ties with populations in other Central Asian states (Kerr & Swinton, 2008: 98). This is also a result of the fact that the Wakhan Corridor is a political creation, derived from a political agreement between the British and
Russian empires in the late nineteenth century (U.S. Bureau of Intelligence, 1983). Prior to Soviet occupation, a large geographical area in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan was referred to as ‘Western Turkestan’. With an estimated number of 300,000 Uyghurs in Xinjiang and bordering Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, central governments in those three countries see this as a disturbing base for political mobilization in Central Asia (Swanström, 2005:573). Some Uyghurs in Xinjiang are still in search for political independence and support the creation of a new East Turkestan Republic: these are known as the separatist of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Even though fear of popular support for the creation of a new ‘East Turkestan Republic’ is believed to be higher than the actual support among the people in Xinjiang, Afghanistan is regarded as a serious external threat to the stability and security of that region (Ibidem:571). This fear stems from the close linkage between Al Qaeda, Taliban and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), whose solidarity goes back way before 9/11 (Zhao, 2014:3).

Since the Central Asian states gained their independence in 1991, the Muslims minority in Xinjiang has stepped up their separatist activity, including the military variant. Up until 1997, armed violence was a regular occurrence in Xinjiang, and the Uighur separatists were even blamed for attempted bombings in Beijing (Pantucci, 2010:22). From 1996 onwards and throughout the 2000s, Afghanistan became a reliable base for the ‘East Turkistan’ organization, with the Taliban willing to provide shelter, supply weapons, material and training to the Uyghur’s who fought for the liberation of an Islamic Xinjiang. In response, China decided to reinforce its border with Afghanistan, which then became practically impossible to penetrate. In addition, China issued warnings against the former Taliban government about their support to and training of Uyghur rebels, but to no avail (Swanström, 2005:573). It must be noted that while it was certain that at least some of the Uyghur activists used violence to achieve their goals, there were and are heated discussions about the question whether the case of Uyghur separatism is genuine terrorism. In that respect, the events that occurred on September 11, 2001 and the following subsequent crisis is of much importance. These attacks offered an opportunity for Beijing to reframe its battle with the separatists in Xinjiang as part of a bigger international struggle against terrorism (Chung, 2014). Ever since 2001, international concerns have been related to the difficulty to distinguishing between Chinese counterterrorism and repression of the Uyghur minority rights. When the leader of the ETIM got killed in 2003, trouble appeared to lessen in the region. However, in the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympics a number of attempted attacks were once again linked to Uighur extremists (Small, 2010:87). Just a year later in July 2009, protests in Xinjiang following reports of violence between Han and Uighur in the Guangdong province rapidly escalated into the largest and most violent riot, claiming approximately 200 lives (Pantucci,2012:22). Worrisome attacks increased after 2013, with lethal attacks on police stations, and a group armed with knives attacked passengers at a railway station, killing 29 and wounding over 140 civilians (Gartenstein-Ross, 2014). The next month, explosives were set of and people got attacked with knives at another railway station during President Xi Jinping’s tour through Xinjiang (BBC News, 2014). Even though the terrorist characterization of the pro-independence activities in Xinjiang has been criticized by human and civil rights groups as being an excuse for repression of this movement, there have been quite serious
outbursts of violence and confrontations between the ethnic groups and the government over
the last couple of years. The Uyghur Human Rights Project reported that over 700 persons
may have been killed in political violence over 2013-2014 (Finney, 2015). It should be noted
that even though China fears that Afghanistan can one day again serve a strong base for
Uighur militancy, the capacity of external Uyghur militants to launch attacks in China appears
to be limited (van der Kley, 2014a). Instability in Xinjiang is definitely a core-issue for
Beijing, but the level of concrete militant threats for China that stem directly from
Afghanistan is still manageable in that regard. The influence of Afghanistan is worrisome to
Beijing, but dealing with Afghanistan is therefore not considered the top-priority in order to
bring stability to Xinjiang (Interview R2:Q8 and Interview R1:Q10).

Aside from this direct cross-border flow of militants and weapons, arguably more frightening
to the Chinese government is the spread of extremist Islamic and terrorist ideologies (Small,
2010: 87). While the military capability of Uighur militant groups appears to remain limited,
terrorist and pan-Islamic ideological propaganda has become noticeably more sophisticated
(van der Kley, 2014b:7). Al Qaeda and similar groups started to explicitly target China
through statements following the clashes in Xinjiang. Top-ranking Al-Qaeda leader Abu
Yahya al-Libi posted a video on the internet, condemning China for perpetrating ‘injustice
and oppression’ against Muslim, while calling upon the Islamic world to battle this ‘great
country of infidels’ (Tharoor, 2009). In addition, the Islamic Maghreb Al Qaeda threatened to
attack fifty-thousand Chinese workers in Algeria in 2015 (Pantucci, 2010:22). The number of
terrorist groups expressing ideological support for the Uyghur cause has risen over the last
years and has intensified in 2014. In July of that year, ‘caliph’ of the Islamic (IS) Abu Bakr
Al-Baghdadi argued in a speech that “Muslim rights are forcibly seized in China, India,
Palestine” and “Your brothers all over the world are waiting for your rescue, and are
anticipating your brigades”.9 Later, the IS released a map of the envisioned caliphate:
Xinjiang was included (Moore,2014). Just a month later, Al Qaeda released the first issue of
their propaganda magazine ‘Resurgence’, containing an article about ‘Ten Facts about East
Turkestan’. The content stressed Xinjiang’s historical independence from China, and implies
that the region has just recently been colonized by the anti-Islam Han Chinese (As Sahab
Media, 2014). Such pan-Islamic propaganda has played an important role for some Uyghur
separatist groups in the past (Fagoyinbo, 2013:10), and this ideological influence seems to
become more of a stressing issue for the Chinese government.

Finally, another Chinese security concern is the impact of the Afghan narcotics industry. As
will be elaborated upon in Chapter VII, Afghanistan produces and exports more opium than
any other country. China suffers from this Afghan narcotics problem too, because it is easy to
traffic drugs from Afghanistan to China through Central Asia and Pakistan. After Southeast
Asia, Afghanistan has actually become one of the main sources of narcotics trafficking to
China as a result of the geographic proximity (Zhao:5). First on the route of Afghan narcotics
to china is of course Xinjiang, where drugs problems have been worsening in recent years

9 Abstracted from the Declaration: ‘A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of
Ramadan’ from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, full statement available at
(Norberg & Holmquist, 2014: 15). An increase in drug abuse has been reported in Xinjiang, further exacerbating societal breakdown in that region (Weitz, 2015:15). The development of illicit drugs trafficking networks from Afghanistan into China has therefore become increasingly worrisome to Beijing.

4.4 Summary

As illustrated above, China’s motivation to get involved in Afghanistan is not determined by one single factor. There are both interests and concerns that China has in relation to the country. It is hard to determine whether, and to what extent geostrategic rivalries and ambitions play a role in the formation of China’s policies towards Afghanistan. In a same manner, it is safe to assume that China is probably interested in the country’s largely untapped natural resources, but it is hard to find out exactly how important this is to Beijing. The One Belt, One Road initiative on the other hand is already entering very concrete stages in Central Asia, and it is probable that China is looking to safeguard this ambitious commercial endeavor. It will be hard to implement any plans under the OBOR framework in Central Asia if the entire region is destabilized by the security situation in Afghanistan. Most importantly though, it appears to be the stability of Xinjiang that lies as the heart of China’s concerns about Afghanistan. Negative spill-over effects of Afghan security threats to the northwestern province have worried Beijing over the years, which also include the problematic flow of narcotics into Xinjiang. While separatist activism in that region has been an issue since the 1990s, tensions have intensified since 2009. The direct link between militant groups in Afghanistan and the ETIM is cause for concern and there is fear for an upsurge of Islam-inspired extremist violence and political insurgency in China and the entire region if Afghanistan lapses into chaos. This concern is exacerbated by the modern and more advanced types of propaganda that is employed by these groups to spread their ideologies. While Beijing does not view Afghanistan as the main instigator of instability in Xinjiang, the border-crossing effects of Afghan security issues on that region are considered troublesome. In sum, while China certainly has economic and possibly also geopolitical interests in Afghanistan, it are probably foremost security concerns that shape Beijing policies towards Afghanistan, and in that regard the desire to maintain stability in the Xinjiang region is of most importance. In the following four chapters, an overview will be given of developments in Sino-Afghan relations since 2014 to illustrate how China’s interests and concerns have translated into actions in Afghanistan. These developments will be subdivided and analyzed in the following four Chapters that each addresses different elements of the New Asian Security Concept.
Chapter V: Common Security

5.1 Introduction

This analysis starts with the first element of the New Security Concept: ‘common security’. This element strongly resonates the ‘non-interference’ principle, because it advocates that countries should abstain from interfering in other nation’s internal affairs, out of respect for other countries legitimate rights, interests, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The following three guidelines for action were distinguished:

1. China does not interfere with Afghanistan’s internal political affairs
2. China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity
3. China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close consultation with the Afghan government, in full respect of its sovereignty

The landscape of Afghanistan’s domestic affairs is mostly defined by the old and ongoing conflict between the Afghan government and the Taliban. This conflict is not only a security matter in terms of the terrorist threats that the Taliban poses (more on that in the following Chapter), but is also has an important political dimension to it and is therefore of much importance in relation to the Chinese position on international interference. The resurgence of the Taliban has already been discussed to some extent, but this Chapter will provide a more detailed analysis of this conflict and for a large part examine China’s stance towards that internal conflict, both before and after 2014.

5.2 China and the Taliban-Kabul impasse

One common misconception is that with the official end of the U.S. war in Afghanistan in 2014, this meant that the conflict in Afghanistan had come to an actual end. The idea that warfare in Afghanistan is cooling down is unfortunately refuted by reality on the ground (Smith, G: 2014). It was reported in 2013 that the Taliban increased their attacks on the government and international forces, thereby steadily extending their influence over vast swathes of territory, particularly in the southern provinces, but also in previously quiet areas of the north and west (Freedom House, 2013). It was already mentioned that China only shares a small border with Afghanistan at the Wakhan frontier, which is located in the north-western province of Badakhshan. This border stems from a Boundary Agreement that was signed by both countries in 1963 (U.S. Office of the Geographer, 1969). The Wakhan border has been closed to regular border traffic for nearly a hundred years (Stanzel, 2014). The Afghans have repeatedly asked for China to open up the border, but Beijing is consistent in its stand of keeping the Corridor closed, partially out of fear for the link between the Taliban and Uyghur separatists which was mentioned before. While it is a long-held desire from Afghanistan in the hope to see an influx of Chinese development, China is concerned about the risks of increased flow of militants, weapons, and drugs through the frontier. This northern region of Afghanistan was also once considered to be relatively free of insurgents, but since 2014 there were several reports about increased activity from the Taliban and even ISIS in this province too (Al Jazeera, 2015). Beijing’s concerns that this unrest in Afghanistan would spill over into Xinjiang was reason enough for President Xi Jinping to refuse another request from President
Ghani to open the border pass in 2014 (The State Council of the Peoples Republic of China, 2014). Over the last years of Operation Enduring Freedom, Taliban forces were not only returning, but actually increasing their presence in almost all corners of the country. Their control over large areas had already expanded to such an extent that both western actors and the Kabul regime were being forced to acknowledge that they could no longer be excluded from political negotiations (Aris & Snetkov, 2012:1). As a result, the Afghan government has been pursuing peace talks with the Taliban leadership, while simultaneously persuading lower level fighters to re-integrate into society. However, up to 2014, these small-scale negotiations with the Taliban did not seem to offer much hope (Smith, 2014:3). While there have been low-ranking fighters that agreed to stop fighting, the Taliban leaders did not seem interested in negotiating, let alone accepting the Afghan constitution. Analysts and neighboring countries feared that the absence of a political settlement would make a return to civil war possible, and this permanent condition of instability was perceived as one of the main threats to the regional security architecture (Indeo, 2014).

With this context in mind, several developments in late 2014 pointed out that China was willing to take on an active mediating and facilitating role with these negotiations between the Taliban and the Kabul regime. In November of that year, Beijing hosted the fourth round of the ‘Istanbul Process’ conference on Afghanistan, with foreign ministers from Central Asian countries attending. This ‘Istanbul Process - Heart of Asia’ platform was initiated in 2011 to provide a new agenda for regional cooperation in the ‘Heart of Asia’ for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan (MFAIRA, 2016). During the conference, Premier Li Keqiang delivered a speech ‘Let Us Join Hands to Promote Security and Prosperity of Afghanistan and the Region’ and specifically stressed the principles of 'common security' in relation to Afghanistan:

“The international community should respect Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, not interfere with its internal affairs and support Afghanistan's efforts to realize security and stability” (FMPRC, 2014d).

Not much later, it was reported that during this conference discussions had taken place regarding a Chinese proposal for a ‘peace and reconciliation forum’ that would gather representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the Taliban command (Donati, 2014). According to Afghan and Pakistani reports, a Taliban delegation visited Beijing just shortly after the conference to meet with Chinese officials.10 In response to these reports, the Chinese government did not officially confirm the occurrence of this meeting, but stated that:

“As a friendly neighbor of Afghanistan, China attaches great importance to developing relations with Afghanistan, hopes to see Afghanistan achieve lasting peace, stability and development at an early date, supports the "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" process toward peace and reconciliation and wishes to play a constructive role to that end” (FMPRC, 2015a).

However, it became increasingly clear that China was getting involved with these peace negotiations between the Kabul regime and the Taliban. Late November, Special Envoy to Afghanistan Sun Yuxi publicly confirmed that there had indeed been several meeting the Afghan Taliban (Abrar, 2014). This was an interesting development, because past efforts by the United States and NATO to broker peace between the Afghan government and Taliban came to no avail and it was entirely possible that China would not succeed either (Small, 2014:82). At the same time, Dr. Gill notes that these ‘reconciliation efforts’ were also a prime example of China’s low-risk approach, because China had little to lose by bringing these parties to the table, but there was a potential for much benefits (Interview R3:.Q6). An important advantage that Beijing did have as a ‘peace-broker’ was its good relationship with Pakistan, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter VII. This country has an important role in Taliban related issues and western countries have had much difficulty to get Islamabad to play a supportive part in the Afghan-Taliban conflict, despite years of pressure (Moeed, 2015).

Since this Heart of Asia conference, Chinese officials repeatedly emphasize the fact that Afghanistan’s reconciliation efforts should be ‘Afghan-led and Afghan-owned’. Special Envoy Sun accentuated that China was willing to provide a neutral venue for negotiations between the Taliban and the central government, but the process must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, meaning that the agenda itself must be proposed by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (Rashid, 2014). Not much later, while meeting with Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) prime ministers’ meeting in December 2014, premier Li Keqiang once again stressed: ‘China attaches great importance to the development of its relations with Afghanistan, supporting it to push forward a reconciliation process dominated and owned by the Afghan people’ (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2014a). China’s involvement with the Afghan peace talks continued and in May 2015, an Afghan peace envoy met in western China for a meeting with officials of the former Taliban regime, a meeting that was organized by China and Pakistan (Wong & Mashal, 2015). Not much later in July, a spokesperson for President Ghani told NBC news that Afghanistan had sent a delegation to Pakistan for follow-up talks with the Taliban (Rahim & Yusufzai, 2015). However, these talks came to an abrupt end on the 29th of July, after Afghan officials released news on the death of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar two years earlier (Rashid, 2016 and Nordland, 2015). After several months of radio silence, it was again China who pushed for a continuation of peace talks in December 2015 at the 5th Heart of Asia conference. Attending Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put out a set of principles through which he called out for enhanced international cooperation on the Afghan issue. Amongst others, it was once again stressed that international commitment to Afghanistan’s reconstruction should occur on the basis of respect for Afghanistan’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. More importantly, he called on all parties to firmly back Afghanistan’s reconciliation process and urged to ‘resume the peace talks at an early date’ (FMPRC, 2015b). Interestingly, there was no specific mention of the phrase Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, and some analysts argued that it appeared as if the former emphasis on Afghanistan’s self-governance had made some room for a more vocal stance on
the necessity of external support.\footnote{For a more elaboration on this apparent shift in China’s tone, see Tiezzi, S. (2015). China pushes Afghanistan, Pakistan back towards peace process, The Diplomat, \url{www.thediplomat.com} [accessed 08-06-16]} Following up on the conference in December, an official ‘Quadrilateral Coordination Group’ was formed in January 2016 with Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States participating in an effort ‘to advance the peace and reconciliation process between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan national government in Kabul’ (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Quite problematically however, efforts to bring the Taliban to the table were repeatedly unsuccessful and after several meetings the reconciliation dialogue was adjourned (Wazir, 2016). These negotiations were complicated by the fact that there are rivaling fractions within the Taliban, since there was no longer a single central authority (Seerat, 2015:5). That efforts to revive the peace negotiations in May 2016 once again failed became crystal-clear when the Taliban issued the following statement in response to reports that they were willing to participate in the process:

"We reject all such rumors and unequivocally state that the leader of Islamic Emirate has not authorized anyone to participate in this meeting," and "(Islamic Emirate) once again reiterates that unless the occupation of Afghanistan is ended, black lists eliminated and innocent prisoners freed, such futile misleading negotiations will not bear any results.” (Sobhani, 2016)

In both 2015 and 2016, President Ghani expressed his gratitude on China readiness for cooperation in Afghanistan peace process, indicating that the Afghan government welcomed China’s increased involvement in its domestic reconciliation process (Yishen, 2015 and Noori, 2016). Both during a meeting with President Xi Jinping in July 2015 and with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in December 2015, the Afghan president also specifically thanked China for respecting Afghanistan's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty (FMPRC, 2015c). However, there were reports of more criticism towards the negotiations amongst Afghan officials in 2015. Voices in the Afghan government argued that serious talks with the Taliban meant overlooking all the atrocities this group has committed in the last two decades, in addition to which there were suspicions in relation to Pakistan’s intentions in the peace talks (Seerat, 2015:16). In addition, just weeks after the Taliban refused to participate in the latest Quadrilateral talks in May 2016, Reuters reported that in July 2016, an Afghan Taliban delegation visited China to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, with no other countries participating (Ahmad, 2016). A Pakistani news agency reported that Afghan Taliban claimed that this visit was aimed to discuss a joint stance against the ‘occupation’ of Afghanistan by invading countries (Kahn, 2016). In turn, news agency VOA said that this time, the Afghan government was disgruntled over reports of this visit, saying that China should not provide ‘a platform’ to groups that are killing Afghans. When asked for a reaction, the Afghan Foreign Ministry noted:

"Afghanistan and China enjoy strong, friendly relations. We believe our friends in China will always prefer to maintain state-to-state relations and China will not provide a platform to those groups that are responsible for the killing of the people of Afghanistan."(Gul, 2016)
While senior Taliban officials confirmed the visit, Beijing has not yet commented on questions about the occurrence of these meetings. In that regard, another interesting observation is that there were also reports that China not only maintained relations with the Taliban, but was also willing to maintain contact with other militant groups. When Chinese investment in the Amu Darya oil fields was disrupted by militias in June 2012, China made a deal with them to ensure that they would no longer interfere with the project (Gartenstein-Ross et al, 2014:3). Dr. van der Putten noticed that this is in line with a subtle shift that China has made in its foreign policies of the last years. He argues that where Beijing historically was focused on maintaining friendly relations with central governments of states, the Chinese have in recent years shown a readiness to nurture relationships with other important intra-state actors. He sees this as the result of experiences in Sudan and Libya, where the Chinese government lacked relationships with rebelling groups that gained power. Through more attention on relations with important intra-state groups China is hedging its bets, which can be interpreted as a risk-management approach that is aimed to safeguard China’s interests in those countries (Interview R1:Q5). In the case of Afghanistan, it is known that China has been in several other of such negotiations with non-governmental actors, for example to protect commercial investments or to prevent militant groups from supporting Uyghur separatism. Some analysts argue that this willingness from China to engage and negotiate with violent non-state actors is likely to create tensions with other partners such as the U.S., and argue that this could possibly even harm the government in Kabul (Gartenstein-Ross et al, 2014:17). In the case of the negotiations with the local warlord in Amu Darya, the Afghan government said that several top Chinese executives had raised concerns over the disruption, which indicates that there was sufficient bilateral coordination between Beijing and Kabul on that matter (Shalizi, 2012).

5.3 Common Security: Analysis

As illustrated in the theoretical framework, ‘common security’ centers around the notion that countries must have respect for other countries legitimate rights, interests and sovereignty, because no country should seek its own absolute security at the expense of others. As such, ‘common security’ is strongly embedded in the old ‘non-interference’ principle, because countries should abstain from interfering in other nations internal affairs and respect their independence and territorial integrity. In the case of China’s conduct in Afghanistan, this led to three indicators.

1. China does not interfere with Afghanistan’s internal political affairs

A first observation is that before 2014, China refused to participate in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan and was not willing to contribute troops to the ISAF mission: a stance that was completely in line with their non-interference principles. During these years, China has been minimally involved with this internal conflict between the Kabul regime and the Taliban and kept a very low profile. The Chinese foreign policy in this period was thus mostly defined by non-action. In the years up to 2014, marginalization of the Taliban as an armed opposition failed and the group instead steadily increased their influence. Their resurgence led to the political reality to negotiate with the Taliban through peace talks. Interestingly, in 2014 it
became clear that China was willing to take on an active role in this so-called ‘reconciliation process’. While this started under a cloak of secrecy, in late October 2014, official news in the following months confirmed that China had held talks with the Taliban and had proposed a ‘peace and reconciliation forum’ with the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, China and the U.S. participating. These talks were unsuccessful and came to an end in 2015, but just several months later China initiated a similar forum in the form of the ‘Quadrilateral Coordination Group’. While once again no progress was made, the increased involvement of China in these diplomatic efforts stands in contrast to its previous stance in Afghanistan’s internal conflict. This is a type of engagement in Afghanistan’s domestic affairs that China has previously been wary of, and this can be interpreted as a deviation from a strict adherence to the non-interference principle. On the other hand however, it can be argued that the exact role that China adopted was not necessarily ‘interfering’, but that this was rather neutral ‘involvement’. After all, concrete actions were of mediating and facilitating nature, for example by providing a neutral setting for discussions and bringing relevant parties to the table: Beijing did not choose sides in Afghanistan’s domestic issues. In sum, it can best be argued that the involvement of China in the Afghan political affairs underscores that Beijing applied a more ‘flexible’ interpretation of the non-interference principle. Beijing does not necessarily undermine the principle, but neither upholds it in its totality. These findings therefore provide no significant evidence that China does, or does not apply this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan.

2. China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity

In terms of territorial integrity, there are no significant tensions to be noted after 2014. There is no indication whatsoever that Beijing is looking for a border change, or violated Afghanistan’s integrity in any other manner. An interesting observation is however that China refuses to open up the Wakhan Corridor pass, despite multiple requests from the Afghan government, also after 2014. This continued stance by Beijing highlights that they attach more importance to domestic stability in Xinjiang than to the possible benefits that opening of this border might yield for Afghanistan. However, there is also no direct indication that this comes at the expense of Afghanistan’s security. This can therefore not be interpreted as an action that goes against the principle of respect for Afghanistan’s territorial integrity. In sum, China does uphold this principle, so these findings provide strong evidence that China does apply this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan.

3. China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close coordination with the Afghan government, in full respect of its sovereignty

In relation to the involvement of China with the domestic politics of Afghanistan’s reconciliation talks, Chinese officials repeatedly stressed that the process was ‘Afghan-owned and Afghan-led’ and thus heavily emphasized Afghanistan sovereignty. Adopting a purely facilitating role, China made clear to everyone that it would be the Afghans that set the agenda. The fact that Afghan president Ghani welcomed China and reiterated that they indeed demonstrated full respect for Afghanistan’s sovereignty in this process is a strong confirmation. There are some concerns that China’s willingness to engage with other
important intra-state actors in Afghanistan can undermine the sovereignty of the central government. China’s desire to keep non-governmental actors in that country from disrupting their investments or supporting of Uyghur militants has prompted them to maintain at least some level of contact. While there have been reports of such channels of communication, up until recently there was no conclusive evidence that the Afghan government is unaware of Beijing’s ties with these groups or even worse, that Kabul is disgruntled about this approach. The news about Kabul’s displeasure about the Taliban visit to China in July 2016 is a very important irregularity in that regard. Reports suggest that the Afghan government was at the very least uninformed and the lack of Chinese comments on the meetings is not restoring confidence. This news does underscore that there is a tension between China’s desire to nurture relationships with other important intra-state actors and full respect for Afghanistan’s sovereignty, which prescribes an emphasis on the maintenance of friendly state-to-state ties. However, the news is of such recent nature that it is not yet possible to gain an exact insight in the level of contact between China and the Taliban, and Beijing’s coordination with Kabul on these matters. It is not yet possible to make a profound analysis of the exact level of friction that these meetings caused. As of yet, all other signals suggested that there is a good level of coordination between the two central governments and full respect for Afghan sovereignty. The findings that suggest otherwise cannot (yet) be deemed conclusive, but they are worrying. Therefore, these findings provide modest evidence that China does apply this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (+).

Table 4: Findings Common Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.  China does not interfere with Afghanistan’s internal political affairs</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2.  China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.  China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close coordination with the Afghan government, in full respect of its sovereignty</td>
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**Chapter VI: Comprehensive Security**

**6.1 Introduction**

This Chapter addresses the question to what extent China assists Afghanistan in terms of security engagement. This involves both traditional and non-traditional security threats, such as the challenges brought by terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security and major natural disasters. Xi Jinping also specifically emphasized the threat of the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism and extremism. In relation to the element of ‘comprehensive security’, the following indicators were formulated:

1. *China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently*
2. *China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges*

This Chapter will begin with an examination of the most important security threats in Afghanistan, after which an overview will be given of Chinese contributions to help Afghanistan tackle these problems. It is evident that one of the main domestic threats for Afghanistan stems from military active insurgency groups like the Taliban, and the inability of the Afghan government to address this challenge. It should be noted that in the previous chapter, a detailed examination of China involvement with the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the Afghan government was already presented. This was discussed in that chapter, because as a part of internal politics in Afghanistan, the Taliban reconciliation process is a domestic affair that belongs to the ‘common security’. This is because the Taliban is considered a political force that needs to be incorporated in political processes. However, the Taliban is also a direct threat to the security situation in Afghanistan through its acts as a terrorist organization and therefore also an element of ‘Comprehensive security’.

**6.2 Afghanistan’s main security threats**

When discussing the typical non-traditional security threat of terrorism, it needs to be highlighted that the Taliban is not the only terrorist threat in Afghanistan. It is joined by a number of other insurgency groups.

While the resurgence of the Taliban in the last years has already been discussed, there are also reports that Al Qaeda, the most prominent target of the Western invasion in 2001, has re-established its headquarters in southern Afghanistan in 2016. In the words of a former British commander in Afghanistan, ‘the return of al-Qaeda to southern Afghanistan is deeply embarrassing for the governments of American and Britain’ (Coughlin, 2016). Afghan Minister of Defense Stanikzai told the CNN that while Al Qaeda is keeping a low-profile, it is actively expanding, reorganizing and preparing itself for bigger attacks (Walsh, 2016). After the discovery of a training camp in Kandahar, former estimates of the group’s strength had to be revised, since the camp alone had far more active members than the estimated total of 100. There are also reports about the emergence of a growing threat from Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (IS) in Afghanistan. In 2016, ISIS announced the foundation of a new chapter in
Khorasan - an ancient Islamic region encompassing parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India. This ISIS affiliate under the name of Wilayat Khorasan became operational and active in 2015, when it came to control populated areas in Afghanistan’s eastern provinces, in addition to which they launched a number of attacks on Kabul and Jalalabad (Gambhir, 2015:2). While the Afghan security forces have tried to crack down on ISIS, the group is likely to expand its operations, especially because they have already been able to make alliances with other Jihadist groups in Northern and Eastern Afghanistan (Gambhir, 2015: 6). The gravity of the IS threat was exemplified in July 2016, when the Islamic State claimed responsibility for a suicide attack during a Shiite demonstration in the capital Kabul: at least 80 people were killed and over than 230 civilians wounded (Harooni, 2016). There is limited information about the exact presence and expansion of ISIS in Afghanistan, and whether IS will stay in the country long-term will probably be determined in the ideological domain, since IS is a rival of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. There have been multiple accounts of clashes between IS and the Taliban since 2015, with both sides declaring war on the other group. With the Taliban, Al Qaeda, IS all gaining strength vis-à-vis the Afghan security forces, fighting in and around populated areas increased along with suicide attacks in Afghanistan’s biggest cities. These were the main causes of conflict-related civilian deaths and injuries in 2015, which resulted in the number of Afghan casualties hitting a record high 11,000 according to a UN Report (UNAMA, 2016).

Another big problem for Afghanistan is the narcotics industry, which has played a critical destabilizing role in Afghanistan because the opium networks are also deeply tied to the insurgency problems. According to the UN, some Taliban factions even show more similarities to a poppy-driven mafia than ideology-driven political groups and as such, funds from the drug-trade appear to play a key role in funding of operations of the Taliban and many other groups (Peters, 2009:2). The increase in revenue from narcotics over the last years reportedly even reduced the Taliban’s incentives to reach a political settlement with the Kabul regime during reconciliation talks (Laub, 2014). The link between Afghanistan and drugs trafficking is self-explanatory, simply because Afghanistan is the world’s biggest heroin producer (Norberg & Holmquist, 2014). The Afghan narcotics industry has sever effects on the regional and even global security, with drug networks spreading narcotics throughout Central Asia into the wide world. The weak controls along the inter-state borders in the region exacerbate this problem and its associated social effects, as its affects public health, spreads HIV, increases the influence of organized crime, causes drug-use-related violence and deaths and breeds corruption at all levels (Indeo, 2014: 262). It has been argued that narco-trafficking has not been addressed successfully during ISAF’s mandate, having an impact outside the country’s borders, feeding organized crime in the region and beyond (Marchesoni, 2016). While there was some success in reducing the area dedicated to poppy cultivation and the total amount of opium in the years following 2008, the latest figures available from the United Nations suggest that the trend has reversed in the last couple of years, with the area under poppy cultivation in 2013 rising 36% over the 2012 figure and the total production went

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up by about 50% over the same period (Smith, 2014:18). In the words of a UN report, ‘opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached a sobering record high in 2013’, but it still continued to rise in 2014 and even though it was finally decreased by 19% in 2015, cultivation records are still amongst the highest ever in Afghanistan (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2013:3 and 2015:3). Regional drug trafficking does not only lead to transnational violence, with criminal gangs and insurgent groups fighting for control over lucrative smuggling routes, it also leads to drug abuse and addiction throughout the region. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan are all connected to Afghanistan through drug smuggling routes and as discussed before, so is the Chinese region of Xinjiang. Therefore, the effects of the Afghan narco-industry are truly felt region-wide (Reeves, 2014:11). In sum, Afghanistan’s main security threats are the interconnected issues terrorism, organized crime and narcotics, problems which have all gone from bad to worse over the last years. The following paragraphs will describe Chinese contributions to help Afghanistan deal with these security issues.

6.3 Chinese Security Assistance Before 2014

In the introduction it was already mentioned that from the very beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, China was reluctant to participate in the international ISAF mission and refrained from sending troops. Overall, China has avoided becoming militarily entangled in international involvement in Afghanistan: it never contributed to international forces and did not allow ISAF to make use of its bases or airspace (Ludwig, 2013:83). Part of the motivation to remain strictly neutral in the war in Afghanistan was not to arouse hostility in the Islam-dominated Central Asian region. There were concerns about how more involvement would be perceived by the Muslim population, both in China itself as abroad. The greatest risk was that China itself would become a target for international terrorist networks (Small, 2014:4). As a result, Chinese assistance to Afghanistan’s security forces started out small in 2002, when the Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan made the proposal to let China provide training to twenty Afghan military officers. Not much later, the Chinese government signed an agreement regarding material assistance on security matters, providing the Afghan government with 20,000 sets of police uniforms, 50,000 sets of military uniforms, boots and other clothing (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2002). This type of assistance to the Afghan security sector intensified after 2005, when Beijing once again supplied the Afghan National Security Forces with approximately two million dollars worth of military equipment and a variety of multiple China-based training programs. This included training for the Afghan National Police on a variety of security operations such as criminal investigations, narcotics and riot control. Furthermore, military officers were taken to the Chinese Liberation army military facilities for a wide range of courses on basic, advanced and senior levels (Cordesman, 2012:10). In 2006, Afghanistan and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding, in which China agreed to allocate $3 million for the provision of training to approximately thirty thousand Afghan military soldiers by 2010 (Ibidem: 14). Also stemming from 2006 is the ‘Treaty of Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation’, an important bilateral agreement which forged closer ties between the two countries, especially in terms of security cooperation to maintain peace in the region (National People’s Congress of PRC,
2006). In a Joint Statement about that Treaty, the two countries emphasized the need for enhanced cooperation in the field of national defense, security and police affairs. In that respect, the Chinese side vowed its support for Afghanistan’s effort in (re)establishing national stability, with both sides reaffirming their mutual support on fighting the ‘three forces’ of terrorism, separatism, extremism and transnational crimes such organized crime, illegal immigration, drug trafficking and illegal arms trade. As a part of these commitments, about forty Afghan military officers participated in a China-sponsored minesweeping training course in 2009, which was repeated again in 2010 and 2014. In 2012, top security official Zhou Yongkang made a ‘surprise visit’ to Kabul that was of much significance because it was the first time a senior Politburo member visited the country since 1966 (van der Kley, 2014b:7). The two countries declared to a “strategic and cooperative partnership” in fighting transnational security threats, and assured cooperation regarding the frequently mentioned ‘three forces’ (Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2012). However, despite the often reiterated rhetoric of cooperation, bilateral agreements up until 2014 have been described as mostly symbolic of nature (Cordesman, 2012:9). In addition, actual contributions to the Afghan security forces were being described as ‘minimal’ in comparison to other states in the region and international great powers (Wishnick, 2014:134). During the period after the formation of Hamid Karzai’s provisional government in 2002 up until 2014, China was seen as keeping the lowest profile on Afghanistan of any ‘great power’, because Beijing continued to reject the possibility of direct military involvement and only provided minimal training and assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces (Gartenstein-Ross et al, 2014:3).

6.4 Chinese Security Assistance Post-2014

In 2014, the frequency of visits of Chinese security and defense officials indicated that Beijing was increasingly preoccupied with Afghan security and willing to act on that. In the year 2014 alone for example, the Chinese Minister of Public Security and State, the People’s Liberation Army’s Deputy Chief of Staff and the Chief of the Joint Staff of the Central Military Commission all paid a visit to Afghanistan, it was a number of high-ranking visits that had not been seen since the enactment of the Afghan government (Zhao, 2016: 901). Most of these visits concerned discussions about bilateral cooperation to guard the countries against terrorist activities. In October 2014, just before President Ghani’s visit to China, the Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan said that:

“Terrorism, religious extremism and separatism are the common threats to us, we should crack down on those threats with more close coordination. China is ready to strengthen our cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan in personnel training and technical exchanges on counterterrorism, anti-narcotics for our common interests of national security”(Gul, 2014a).

As mentioned earlier, terrorism and the narcotics industry are the two biggest, interlinked security threats in Afghanistan, and this statement was seen as a green light for Kabul to seek Chinese assistance in this regard (Khalil, 2016). In return, Afghanistan pledged its

commitment to help China combat the aforementioned Uyghur separatists from the Xinjiang and their affiliated East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). During Ghani’s visit to China, he stated: ‘Afghanistan will not allow any activities that threaten China’s security on Afghan territory.’ (China Daily, 2014). Just several months after this visit, Afghanistan arrested and handed over a number of 15 Uyghur militants (Shalizi, 2016). In May 2015, Afghan Minister of Interior Olomi met with China’s top security official Meng Jianzhu in Beijing and they elevated this cooperation to an official level when they signed an Agreement in the fight against terrorism and drug-smuggling. This included promises about Chinese provision of training and equipment to the Afghan National Police (Joyenda, 2015). Similar support was given to the Afghan Border Police (ABP) through an agreement through which China pledged to assist defective equipment to the ABP (Kohistani, 2014). When the province of Kunduz was seized by the Taliban in 2015, it was announced that a Memorandum of Understanding on military cooperation was signed, but no more details were given regarding this agreement (Kabul News, 2015). A real breakthrough in Sino-Afghan security relations occurred in February 2016, during another high-level visit from Chinese top military official General Fang, who met several Afghan leaders, amongst which the president, minister of Defence and the National Security Advisor. During this visit, an agreement was reached for a military aid package of 480 million renminibi ($73 million) to be allocated to the ANSF. This sum is still small in comparison to the direct aid that the ANSF received from some other countries (in the case of the U.S. e.g., the total accounts over tens of billions U.S. dollars) but it was an unprecedented move that according to the Afghan Defense Ministry reflected China’s willingness to deepen its engagement (Donati, 2016). In addition, general Fang proposed to form a joint anti-terrorism mechanism of cooperation with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan. He stressed that this call for cooperation in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan is of great importance to Beijing, also because terrorism is a ‘big threat’ to the One Belt, One Road project. It is unclear how this proposal will materialize, since few details about the security bloc were offered when the idea was proposed (Shi, 2016). It is an important development though, because in December 2015 China passed China’s first counter-terrorism law, of which Article 71 permits China to employ security forces on anti-terrorism missions abroad, upon agreement with the central military commission and the authorities of the other respective countries.14 Mr. Pantucci also argues that this framework that enables Chinese soldiers to operate externally, for example in Afghanistan, is another important testament to China’s slow, but gradual move away from the non-interference principle as part of Beijing’s normalization of its role as a more active player in international security affairs (Interview R2:Q2). The most recent development in Sino-Afghan security relations occurred on the 3th of July, 2016 when China delivered the first shipment of military aid, which included transport equipment for the Afghan security forces and light-weapon ammunition. Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar said that China would also deliver scanners, vehicles and military helicopters in the following months (Gul, 2016a). Heavy weaponry still appears off-limits, but it is notable that before 2016, China also used to refuse to provide aerial assets to Afghanistan.

6.5 **Comprehensive Security: Analysis**

Going back to the theoretical framework, ‘comprehensive security’ entailed upholding security in both traditional and non-traditional fields. Xi Jinping presses for enhanced cooperation on the ‘three evils’, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security. As illustrated in the beginning of this chapter, Afghanistan’s biggest security threats have for a long period been the interconnected issues of terrorism, insurgency and the narcotics industry. Unfortunately, all of these problems only appear to be intensifying over the last couple of years, which appears to leave the Afghan security forces in desperate need for support. Through the two indicators that were formulated in the theoretical framework, China’s security contributions in post-2014 Afghanistan can be examined.

1. *China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently*

In terms of concrete support, a first observation is that China’s role before 2014 was described as minimal because it was limited to a very small amount of training and assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces. After 2014, it is still certain that Beijing prefers to provide help through ‘soft’ security assistance in the form of training and equipment. However, there does seem to be a steady increase in the volume of such assistance. This is most significantly illustrated by the fact that China offered the Afghan army a military aid package that exceeded any previous type of assistance. The amount of $73 million is not very impressive when compared to support from other countries, but it is significant when taking into account that China previously has been very wary of publicly supporting the Afghan military. Especially when considering that China prefers to nurture relationships with other relevant parties in Afghanistan, most importantly the Taliban, this is a relatively strong sign of public support to the Afghan government. In sum, the actual contributions to the Afghan security forces have been minimal up to 2014, and have definitely been increasing, but were still modest in the following years. Therefore, these findings provide some evidence that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (+).

2. *China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges*

The increase in bilateral exchanges since 2014 that relate to security underline that China has given more importance to Afghan security. The unprecedented number of visits of top-level security officials, bilateral security agreements and memoranda are a clear sign of this positive trend in Sino-Afghan security relations. It must be noted that this shift did not necessarily start in 2014, because the visit of then security chief Zhou Yongkang to Kabul in 2012, as the most senior Chinese leader to visit the country in decades, was a strong first signal. It is obvious that the main shared threat that prompted this intensified cooperation is considered to be terrorism. The presidents from both countries highlighted the need to address terrorist threats on numerous occasions and reached an ‘important consensus’ on combating the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, upon which words Afghanistan quickly acted. This underscores that China’s deepened security engagement in Afghanistan is very much
motivated by the desire for stability in Xinjiang. However, it is still fairly difficult to find examples of any practical bilateral cooperation efforts in the field of counter-terrorism. The introduction of an ‘anti-terrorism bloc’ in 2016 between China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan is a noteworthy development. It is especially interesting against the backdrop of China’s new counter-terrorism laws, which enable troops to be deployed abroad, but here too, concrete operational matters about this cooperative mechanism are still unclear. In addition, there are little to no reports on joint efforts in the area of counter-narcotics collaboration. In sum, when compared to the period before 2014, China’s security cooperation with Afghanistan has been taken to a next level in terms of communication and commitments, but very few concrete efforts have bilaterally been undertaken to address Afghanistan’s security threats. Because of the lack of much actual cooperation but the increase in bilateral security exchanges, these findings suggest no significant evidence that China does, or does not apply this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan: (0).

Table 5: Findings Comprehensive Security

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<th>Indicator</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges</td>
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7.1 Introduction

The third element, ‘cooperative security’, emphasize the need to address both traditional and non-traditional security issues through cooperation and peaceful means, while welcoming all parties to play positive and constructive roles towards that end. In the previous Chapters, some aspects of China’s international cooperation in Afghanistan have already been subject to discussion. The Afghan-Taliban reconciliation efforts for example, already illustrated that China was not only willing to take on a more active role itself, but also seemed more open to international cooperation on that matter. This Chapter will provide a deeper examination of China’s cooperation with other countries and organizations in Afghanistan. These findings will in turn be analyzed in relation to the following three indicators:

1. China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security
2. China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability
3. China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s main security challenges through multilateral platforms

In this Chapter, a distinction has been made between international cooperation on the one hand and multilateral organizations and initiatives on the other. The first part of international cooperation examines China’s relations with other countries in post-2014 Afghanistan. The second segment addresses China’s contributions to the initiatives and organizations that have incorporated a multilateral approach to Afghan stability.

7.2 International Cooperation

China’s inclusion of international partners in processes regarding Afghanistan’s stability starts with Afghanistan’s closest, but arguably most problematic neighbor: Pakistan. The Chinese efforts to involve Pakistan in the reconciliation talks have already been discussed to a certain extent. It is important to note that China’s cooperation with Pakistan makes sense because Beijing and Islamabad have been close partners over decades, prompting the nickname ‘iron brothers’ (van de Walle, 2015:9). In the words of billboards throughout Islamabad when President Xi Jinping visited the country in 2015, it stated that the friendship between the two countries ‘is higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, sweeter than honey, and stronger than steel’ (Tharoor, 2015). Pakistan’s relation with Afghanistan on the other hand is more problematic, most importantly because the Kabul regime believes that Pakistan is supporting the activities of Taliban and the affiliated Haqqani network (Moeed, 2015). Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan and also home to the Taliban, is believed to have more influence and even control over the Taliban than any other country (Riedel, 2013). Since these terrorist groups enjoy sanctuary in Pakistani territory, many Afghans blame Pakistani authorities for violence that the groups perpetrate in Afghanistan. There has been a great amount of international pressure on Islamabad to at least cut support and facilitation for these groups, or to potentially go as far as military action against them, but with very limited result. As a result, it was largely believed that Pakistan failed to take responsibility for helping reduce
violence in Afghanistan (Moeed, 2015). Pakistani officials in turn argue that they are hesitant to fight the Taliban on its soil because of concerns that the group might redirect its violence against Pakistan, possibly even with the support of Afghan intelligence (Tanziem, 2016). Islamabad’s moderate efforts to keep the extremists in check have even caused some concerns in Beijing (Page, 2015). China is increasingly worried about the increasing level of extremism in Pakistan, once again out of fear that Chinese Uyghur separatists can possibly find safe havens and support in Pakistan's border areas (Afridi, 2010). Very similar to the case of Afghanistan, another concern is related to the danger that local terrorism represents for Chinese investments in Pakistan, most specifically the massive China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC). Part of the One Belt One Road initiative, the ‘CPEC’ is an over $40 billion-worth project for a network of railways, roads and pipelines connecting Pakistan's port city of Gwadar with the Chinese city of Kashgar in the Xinjiang (van de Walle, 2015:9). China’s long-lasting and close relationship with this country enabled Beijing to bring this crucial party to the table. This is important because restoring trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan is essential to tackle any problems related to the Taliban. In addition, efforts of the U.S. to pressure Pakistan have had little effects, also because the Washington-Islamabad relationship has deteriorated over the last years. Therefore, a follow-up question will be how China’s engagement in Afghanistan will affect its ‘all-weather’ relationship with Pakistan (Small, 2010:82). While China has been putting Pakistan under pressure to do its part to facilitate a viable Afghan peace process, Dr. van der Putten argues that China will not be willing to ‘push’ Pakistan much further, because it values this good relationship too much (Interview R1:Q5).

Another important player regarding Afghan stability is the United States. While China refrained from criticizing America’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan, China did make clear to doubt its efficacy (Zhao, 2012:1). With regard to this conflict, it was noted that China ‘wanted neither a Western victory that might entrench a U.S. military presence in its backyard, nor a Taliban victory that would pose risks to Xinjiang and the wider region.’ (A. Small cited in Clarke, 2015). From this perspective, besides the security concerns in relations to its western provinces, China’s motivation and conduct in relation to the U.S. also seemed to incorporate a geopolitical element. Beijing’s stance towards U.S. presence in Afghanistan can best be described as ambivalent, or even somewhat contradictory. On the one hand there is fear of instability as a consequence of a precipitous withdrawal of troops. On the other hand, a recurrent theme in Chinese writings addresses the long-held suspicions about long-term U.S. intentions, which includes fear for the possibility that United States plans to expand its regional presence and aims to control Central Asian oil and gas resources and to ‘contain’ or ‘encircle’ China (Dumbaugh, 2010). The so-called U.S. ‘pivot to Asia’, which outlined the intentions of the Obama Administration to reorient significant elements of its foreign policy to strategically focus on the Asia-Pacific region in 2011, only heightened Chinese anxiety about U.S. containment and concerns in the region about more strategic competition between the two powers (Glaser, 2012:22). Tensions between the two superpowers have indeed intensified over the last years in several areas, most significantly due to disputes in the South China Sea, but also regarding trade, currency and cyber security policies and a number of laws and regulations (Wei & Schwartz, 2016). Taking these concerns into account, it is striking that the
recent efforts of China in relation to the Kabul-Taliban discussions often involved close cooperation with the United States. Current and former U.S. officials stress that they welcomed Chinese involvement in Afghanistan after a decade of being ‘rebuffed’ by Beijing, suggesting that this is foremost a shift in Beijing rapprochement (Page, 2015). Mr. Pantucci notes that these developments show pragmatism from both sides, and highlight that these are two mature nations that can have confrontations and a functioning relations at the same time (Interview R2:Q4). Besides the close U.S.-China cooperation in the reconciliation talks, another example of such collaboration is a joint training program of the U.S. and Chinese governments for Afghan diplomats, which was actually launched in 2012. In 2015, similar programs were initiated and co-hosted for agriculture and healthcare personnel (FMPRC, 2015d). Dr. Gill argues that this collaboration between the two countries in Afghanistan illustrates the cooperative aspect of China-U.S. relations that so often gets overshadowed by the South China Sea conflicts (Interview R3:Q7).

There are several other important regional powers that are invested in Afghanistan’s stability, most notably India, Russia and to a lesser extent Iran. China’s cooperation with these countries has been more low-level. Since 2014, bilateral mechanisms on Afghanistan have been established with Iran and India and trilateral mechanisms with Russia and India, Russia and Pakistan. Up until 2016, the bilateral mechanisms have held talks twice; the China–Russia–Pakistan initiative once and the China–Russia–India trilateral mechanism twice (Zhao, 2016:902). Finally, in 2016 a so-called 6+1 consultative mechanism (the ‘one is Afghanistan’) was established, involving the U.S., China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran (Bagchil, 2016). These initiatives signal China’s willingness to cooperate with important stakeholders, but there are significant hurdles to overcome if China wants to convert these intentions into concrete actions.

Very recently for example, Russia announced that it would sit out the talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Kabul, backed by the United States, Pakistan and China (Marshall, 2016). Statements by the Russian envoy to Afghanistan Zabulov suggested that this move seems primarily motivated by discontent towards the U.S.: ‘We won’t join the useless events, and we’ve already told the Americans’. ‘Honestly speaking, we’re already tired of joining anything Washington starts’ (American Foreign Policy Council, 2016). While Russia thus appears to be disengaging with the US-backed Afghan government, there are reportedly also some second thoughts in Moscow about China’s influence in Afghanistan as a part of the larger Central Asian region. For example, some Russian analysts were at unease with the formation of the Chinese anti-terrorism group that involves three Central-Asian countries that were considered part of Russia’s zone of influence (Kucera, 2016). While Beijing and Moscow reiterate to jointly do their best to support Afghan peace, in terms of actual bilateral cooperation in Afghanistan there is very little practical results (Raiszaida, 2016). When it comes to India, a former senior official recently said that his country ‘is stuck in a quandary and is unable to determine its way forward’ regarding Afghanistan (Chaudhury, 2016). However, there were reports that India did seek expansion of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to include three more members, namely Russia, Iran and India, after the initial diplomatic undertaking proved ineffective. Former Afghan Ambassador
to China Baheen underscores that an important point of divergence between China and India on the Afghan issue is the Taliban. He states that whereas Beijing considers the Taliban a political force with extreme elements that must be included in the reconciliation process, New Delhi on the other hand sees the Taliban as a terrorist group and has made it very clear that any type of solution to Afghan peace should not include a deal with the Taliban (Baheen, 2015). Therefore, even though the countries have already agreed in principle to bilateral cooperation, there are obvious complications when it comes to China-India cooperation in Afghanistan (Chaudhury, 2016). While reports are that cooperation between New Delhi and Beijing is moving in a positive direction, cooperation on the Afghan issue has as a result remained rather limited (Pantucci, 2016). China’s relation with Iran has bloomed over the last years, but cooperation regarding Afghanistan has also been limited to a number of diplomatic discussions. A point of disagreement is the role of the U.S.: while China has to a certain extent accepted American involvement in Afghanistan, Iran historically stressed its opposition to any American presence. Iran was for example the only regional power which opposed the Bilateral Security Agreement which allowed for the U.S. and NATO troops to remain in Afghanistan in 2014 (Panda, 2014). In 2015, the European Union’s Special Representative to Afghanistan did argue that the rise of the Islamic State in Afghanistan had made Iran more willing to cooperate with the U.S., but the Americans too are hesitant to work with the Iranians (Sen, 2015). In sum, there have been discussions through a number of diplomatic initiatives with Iran, India and Russia, but in the words of one commentator this is mostly ‘boilerplate diplomat-speak’, because little collaborative action is actually being undertaken (Panda, 2015).

7.3 Regional Multilateral Platforms

Besides these bilateral and trilateral mechanisms, there are a number of multilateral platforms through which China has been able to address the Afghan issue. Xi Jinping’s introduction of the New Asian Security Concept took place at the 4th CICA Summit, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. Later in his speech, the president also stressed the relevance of CICA itself, calling for efforts to enhance the institutional capability of CICA (FMPRC, 2014c). CICA is a regional security forum with the most member countries in Asia, but it is in its essence a platform for dialogue and not an organization that involves actual multilateral cooperation. Besides some diplomatic discussions about the need to address the Afghan issue, the CICA is not of much relevance to the case of Afghanistan.

Another regional organization that does involve such practical cooperation is China’s preferred multilateral vehicle for regional security issues: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO was established in 1996 as the ‘Shanghai Five’, embracing China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, with its primary function being the establishment of confidence-building measures along the shared borders to resolve border disputes between Russia, China and the newly independent Central Asian states (Swanström, 2014:484). During the late 1990s, the organization was rapidly broadened with other functions, as it got to encompass the institutionalization of enhanced cooperation in the political, economic and security field. In 2001, Uzbekistan was welcomed as a new member and the new Shanghai Cooperation Organization was officially created. Maintaining regional
security and stability and combating the “three threats” of terrorism, separatism and extremism has been at the core of the organization’s tasks ever since its enactment.\textsuperscript{15} China, being one of the founding members of the SCO, has given the organization high priority throughout the years (Yuan, 2016:855). After the SCO reached more mature stages, the difference between the Russian and Chinese perspective on the purpose of the SCO became clear when Russian resident Putin made the following statement at the Astana 2005 Summit:

“The SCO has already proven itself a lasting and viable body that is gaining authority as an important regional international organization, I think we could say that this is the main political result” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2005).

Chinese then-President Hu Jintao argued that the main goal now was not international recognition but to convert the potential for cooperation into real concrete successes. He stressed the need to consolidate the practical, not just symbolic potential of the organization:

“We should strive to translate the organization's cooperation potentials into actual results and jointly deal with the challenges brought about by the complex and changing international and regional situations” (FMPRC, 2005).

Since China was perceived to be traditionally distrustful of multilateral undertakings in the security domain, the enthusiastic support for the SCO and its de-facto leadership in the organization seemed to display a departure from China’s traditional approaches to security dialogues (Ong, 2007:111). With security issues at the top of the SCO agenda, Afghanistan’s stability was a major concern for the member states (Kerr & Swinton, 2008:119). In 2005, a ‘Protocol on the Establishment of SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group between SCO and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’ was created, in addition to which Afghan representatives were invited to all high level SCO annual meetings (Tanrisever, 2013: 221). Ever since, Afghanistan’s delegates from the highest diplomatic level – such as president Karzai himself – regularly attend the multilateral platform, and SCO summits are indeed frequently used as opportunities for Chinese and Afghan leaders to meet each other (Zhao, 2012:3). A far-reaching symbolic act - which was urged for by China - was the decision to grant Afghanistan official SCO observer status in 2012 at the SCO meeting in Beijing, which was welcomed by member states and Afghan authorities alike (Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2014:35). Chinese officials repeatedly made clear that they wanted the SCO to play an important role in Afghanistan. This was for example stressed by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jeichi in 2011 at an international conference on Afghanistan (FMPRC, 2011a). In 2015, President Xi Jinping also urged for the SCO to play its due role in Afghanistan and encouraged member states to cooperate with the fight against drug-trafficking and to help with the training of Afghan law enforcement personnel (Huaxia, 2015). However, the SCO’s range of activities remained and remains to be limited to a number of initiatives in the field of counter-terrorism and in terms of counter-narcotics, the SCO has not yet engaged in collective counter-drugs operations, neither has the organization provided training to Afghan counter-narcotics and law enforcement officers (de Haas, 2014). The actual level of concrete

\textsuperscript{15} The Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Foundation, is available at \url{www.tr.china-embassy.org} [accessed 10-05-16]
contributions to Afghan security by the SCO is therefore very modest, despite efforts of China to put Afghanistan at the center of attention (Pantucci & Luo, 2015). In that regard, China has also announced its support for a full membership of Afghanistan at the SCO in 2016 (The Kabul Times, 2016). In relation to this development, it is interesting that the SCO has already been expanded after the inclusion of India and Pakistan as full members on the 24th of June, 2016 and the possibility of Iran joining the SCO is also looming (Putz, 2016). It did however take more than 5 years for the SCO to decide on this membership-expansion, interestingly mostly because reports where that China was reluctant, or even hostile, to India’s membership (Saigianhar, 2016). The question is therefore whether the evolution of the SCO in size will actually enable the countries to promote some sort of regional response to Afghanistan’s perennial security threats. The other possibility is that the organization will be incapacitated by internal geostrategic quarrels and tensions.

The SCO is not the only multilateral platform through which the Afghan security issues were and are addressed. In 2011, another effort on Afghanistan’s future development was launched in the city of Istanbul. It was a Turkish-Afghan initiative that was backed by major Western donors such as the USA: the aforementioned ‘Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process’ (Tadjbakhsh, 2012: 58). This Istanbul Process of Regional Dialogue places Afghanistan at the center of regional cooperation and involves discussions between Afghanistan and China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Discussions in that platform address a number of security issues such as counter-terrorism, counter narcotics and disaster management but also broader developmental issues like education, economic development and regional infrastructure. In the first meeting, Afghan president Karzai explained that the name of the initiative was derived from a famous poem in which Afghanistan is described as the heart of Asia: ‘its prosperity brings prosperity to Asia, and its decay brings decay to Asia’ (Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2011). The project was met with low expectations even before it started and at the first conference multiple participating countries rejected the creation of any new regional organization or security apparatus and instead proposed only the introduction of a broader set of principles that would guide cooperation (Quie, 2014:296). In the end, the Final Statement included no binding agreements and thus the Turkish (and Western) idea of a new security paradigm came short of realization (Tadjbakhsh,2012:59). The entire initiative was already received with caution and due to this lack of progress, it was no surprise that expectations surrounding the process lowered substantially, and this problematic start led to the phrase: ‘The Clogged Arteries of the Heart of Asia’ (Ruttig, 2011). Enthusiasm was tempered because the Heart of Asia initiative was watered down to in essence not much more than a regional multilateral platform on the Afghan issue. Then China hosted the 5th ministerial conference in 2014 and Xi Jinping gave the speech ‘Let Us Join Hands to Promote Security and Prosperity of Afghanistan and the Region’ (FMPRC, 2014). In a subsequent ‘Beijing Declaration’, Chinese officials presented the attendants with a five-point roadmap to increased cooperation in order to address the Afghan issue. The tone of this proposal was very similar to the language used in the New Asian Security Concept, since it stressed that Afghanistan should be governed by the Afghan people according to a social system they prefer, the international community should support an ‘Afghan-led, Afghan-
owned’ peace and reconciliation process, economic reconstruction should be expedited and external support should be fortified.\textsuperscript{16} To emphasize China’s commitment to this path, a non-reimbursable assistance package of approximately $325 million over the years 2014-2017 was announced at this meeting, leading some to argue this time that ‘China pumps adrenaline into the Heart of Asia’ (Hali, 2014).

7.4 Cooperative Security: Analysis

The third element of the New Asian Security Concept is about promoting the security of both individual countries and the region as a whole through dialogue and cooperation. Both traditional and non-traditional security issues should be addressed through cooperation and peaceful means and all parties should be welcomed to play positive and constructive roles in promoting security. The tension between this last part and Xi Jinping’s emphasis on the necessity to let Asian security issues be handled by the Asian people is an important observation for the following analysis. Below, China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan will be discussed in relation to the specific guidelines that were derived from the principles of ‘cooperative security’.

1. China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security

There are clear signs that China is indeed welcoming other countries to contribute to Afghanistan’s security. There are a number of relevant countries when it comes to Afghanistan’s stability. One, if not the most important country in that regard is Pakistan. Since 2014, China has not only welcomed but actually urged Pakistan to get involved with the Afghan reconciliation efforts. When it comes to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, Chinese historical hesitance on their role has been discussed in detail. There are worries about America’s long-term geopolitical intentions in the area, but also concerns about the consequences of a full withdrawal. Despite frictions between the two powers elsewhere, China has become more willing to cooperate with the U.S, a development that underscores the pragmatism and maturity of the nation(s). Through a number of multilateral talks that China initiated, there have been efforts to engage in discussions about Afghanistan with other key regional players, such as India, Russia and Iran. All of these findings suggest that China indeed welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security. Therefore, these findings provide strong indications that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (++).

2. China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability

When it comes to actual cooperation, the analysis once again starts with Pakistan. Due to the strong ‘all-weather’ relationship between China and Pakistan, China did manage to bring Pakistan to the table to participate in the peace talks. Taking into consideration the importance of Pakistan’s role in the Afghan Taliban conflict, this is of much value to Afghan stability.

The reconciliation efforts however have not yielded much success, and there are possibly other ways in which Pakistan could promote Afghan stability, for example by putting more effort in combating the Afghan Taliban or affiliated groups that reside in Pakistan. An interesting question is thus whether China is willing to pressure Pakistan even further on such matters, even if this could consequently lead to a deterioration of their bilateral relations. There is room for improvement, but the inclusion of Pakistan in Afghan peace talks is a big step forward and mainly the result of China’s efforts. China’s willingness to cooperate with the U.S. in Afghanistan since 2014 through the ‘peace and reconciliation forum’ and later on the Quadrilateral Coordination Group is also an interesting development. While there are clearly converging interests, this is the first time the two countries cooperated in Afghanistan in such a public fashion, at a time when tensions between the two powers are actually increasing in other areas. The joint training programs that were initiated in 2012 do suggest that U.S.-China cooperation is not new altogether, but the ‘reconciliation talks’ and the expansion of training programs in 2015 do highlight an increased readiness to work together.

The discussions with Iran, India and Russia on the subject of Afghanistan have as of yet not resulted in noteworthy bilateral or trilateral actions. This is however not necessarily a consequence of an unwillingness to do so on China’s part, it appears as if from these regional powers, Beijing has actually shown the most intentions to achieve practical cooperation. Therefore, these findings provide strong indications that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (++).

3. China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s security challenges through (regional) multilateral efforts

In terms of cooperation through regional platforms, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Heart of Asia initiative are most important. The SCO is a regional security organization that on first hand seems to be the perfect vehicle for coordinated efforts to deal with Afghanistan’s main security threats. With a focus on issues such as counter-narcotics and the ‘three evils’, the organization seems to provide a good mandate for join-activity in these fields. However, the reality is that there have been few actual efforts and practical results have therefore as of yet not consolidated in Afghanistan. But here too, it is plausible to argue that this is not due to a lack of China’s promotion of the idea to take the organization in that direction. Beijing has on several occasions tried to put the Afghan issue at the top of the agenda of the SCO, and also tries to actively involve and sponsor Afghanistan as a member. Another sign that Beijing seems to be proponent of coordinated regional efforts for post-2014 Afghanistan is the fresh impetus that China provided to the ‘Heart of Asia’ Istanbul Process. This initiative was deemed ineffective from the very beginning, and the actions of China at the Heart of Asia were at the very least a strong international call for intensified cooperation to assist in Afghanistan’s reconstruction. The actual level of practical cooperation through these multilateral initiatives remains very limited. In addition, it is and difficult to evaluate to what extent China was willing to put its words in to practice and to what extent these intentions were diplomatic talk. However, since China did repeatedly promote the idea of regional cooperation on Afghanistan, these findings provide some indications that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (+).
Table 6: Findings Comprehensive Security

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<th>Indicator</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. <em>China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability</em></td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s security challenges through (regional) multilateral efforts</em></td>
<td>+</td>
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Chapter VIII: Sustainable Security

8.1 Introduction

The final part of the New Asian Security Concept, ‘sustainable security’, focuses on laying the foundation for security through economic development. In the case of Afghanistan, the question was thus whether China helps Afghanistan achieve greater economic independence. In relation to previous dogma’s, the New Asian Security Concept places much emphasis on the interconnectedness between security and economic development, and this element is thus of much importance to the analysis. China’s contributions in Afghanistan before and after 2014 will be discussed in relation to the following two indicators:

1. China provides (socio)economic assistance to Afghanistan
2. China strengthens its economic relationship with Afghanistan

The outline of this chapter is as follows: firstly, China’s assistance in terms of (socio)economic development will be discussed. This involves direct economic aid and other socio-economic projects and initiatives. In addition, an overview will be presented of other aspects of Sino-Afghan economic relations. This incorporates both trade relations as well as Chinese investments in Afghanistan. As mentioned before, this distinction is not crystal-clear and there might very well be overlap, but this is not problematic since the goal is not provide an overview of relevant developments.

8.2 Chinese Assistance to Afghanistan’s (Socio) Economic Development

A first observation is that Chinese officials frequently stress the economic ‘grass roots’ approach as China’s preferred option to help stabilize post-war Afghanistan, both after and before 2014. In a meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Osman in 2014 for example, his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi stressed the centrality of economic development in China’s strategy towards Afghan security:

“We hope to see the development of Afghanistan. Development is fundamental and only with economic growth can the poverty problem be solved and the foundations of terrorism and extremism be eliminated.” (CCTV, 2014)

Such remarks have been made on numerous occasions over the last decade. At the 2011 Bonn Conference on Afghanistan for example, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi elaborated on the Chinese position on the Afghan issue and also explicitly mentioned China’s focus on economic development while contributing to Afghanistan’s:

“As a friendly neighbor of Afghanistan and a responsible member of the international community, has played an active part in supporting and promoting Afghanistan’s reconstruction process and provided sincere assistance to Afghanistan. China will continue to take concrete steps to help Afghanistan with its peace and reconstruction process and support the development of resources, transport, energy, infrastructure and other sectors in Afghanistan” (FMPRC, 2011a).
At the international conference on Afghanistan in The Hague in 2009, Chinese vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei addressed the audience and made remarks that this economic approach was also necessary to combat Afghanistan-based terrorism:

“The Chinese side strongly supports the endeavor to combat terrorism in all manifestations. At the same time, we maintain that counter-terrorism efforts should be made to address both the symptoms and the root causes of terrorism, and particularly to avoid civilian casualties. Efforts should be made to eliminate the hotbed of terrorism through peaceful development” (PRC Embassy in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2009)

In 2010, Afghan Minister of Commerce and Industry Yalaqi, argued that he considered China’s contribution just as important as that of Western troops and said: ‘If we can create jobs, then youths wouldn't turn to the Taliban. A good economy also has the impact of stability’: a message that the Chinese government probably full-heartedly approved (Tran, 2010).

However, while statements like this have often been issued, the amount of Chinese gross developmental aid over the past decade has in fact been quite modest. Chinese economic aid from 2002 to 2010 to Afghanistan reached a total of approximately $205 million according to official sources (Zhao, 2014:5 and Hornung, 2012). From 2010 up until 2013, China increased its economic aid and accounted for another $80 million worth’s of investment in Afghanistan, but over the period of 2002-2013, China’s support reached a total of approximately $250 million, which is actually listed 23rd in the ranking on the list Official Donors Development Assistance to Afghanistan, behind countries such as Norway, Turkey and the Netherlands (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Finance, 2009:9-11 and Zhao, 2016: 902). During president Ghani’s first visit to Beijing in 2014, China made clear that it does not seek to replace the departed Western troops in Afghanistan but instead promised to play a ‘huge’ commercial role in helping rebuild the country (Martina, 2014). In that line of thought, a joint statement was issued which declared that China would give $327 million to Afghanistan from 2014 up to 2017 (PRC State Council, 2014). China promised to contribute to the construction of rail lines, highways, water conservancies and power facilities in Afghanistan as an essential part of this assistance package (Yinan, 2014). This aid package is definitely a major boost, since this lump sum, which is spread out over three years, exceeds the total amount of aid of the previous ten years. However, it can also be seen in perspective that the UK, EU, Japan, Germany and the US donated over $300 million in gross developmental aid in the single year of 2013-2014 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). It is important to note that there is a big difference in the type of economic assistance that countries offer to Afghanistan. Of the $1.59 billion that the U.S. provided in aid to Afghanistan in 2015 for example, approximately 80 percent of the amount covered peace, security, democracy, governance, healthcare and education issues, and social services. China’s contributions on the other hand, are aimed at targeted contributions to infrastructure (Bakhtar News, 2016). In 2016 for example, Beijing provided Afghanistan with an additional $70 million of non-emergency humanitarian aid, but also agreed to start a feasibility study on implementation of low-cost housing in Afghanistan, and the construction of the Kabul University main building was initiated (FMPRC, 2016). While China has provided relatively
little economic assistance in terms of gross developmental aid, this aid mostly goes directly into reconstruction efforts. Such infrastructural contributions have been made throughout the last decade, with over 30-some projects that include the construction of rail lines, highways, water conservancies, power facilities, hospitals and irrigation projects (Yinan, 2014).

There are other notable initiatives aimed at socio-economic development, such as the U.S-China joint training programs of diplomats and agriculture and healthcare personnel. In 2014, Beijing also agreed to provide five-hundred scholarships to Afghan students from 2015 to 2019 and to train 3000 Afghan bureaucratic professionals (PRC State Council, 2014). In that same year, China also announced intentions to promote media interaction, support Afghanistan to improve women rights, mutual exemption of visas (MFAA, 2014a). To foster cultural people-to-people exchanges, Beijing announced to invite five delegations from Afghanistan and Pakistan, which included governmental, media, diplomatic front and think tanks in 2015 (FMPRC, 2015c). While not of great magnitude, China has been implementing projects in several economic and social sectors in Afghanistan, and Afghan newspaper The Daily Outlook reported the following: “although China is not the largest donor country to Afghanistan, China’s assistance is sincere and without any political conditions attached.” (Daohao, 2016).

8.3 Sino-Afghan Economic Relations

Historically, bilateral trade between China and Afghanistan has also been modest, and mostly limited the import of Chinese goods to Afghanistan. In recent years though, there has been a steady increase in commercial trade because of several developments. In 2010 efforts were made to stimulate Afghan export to China, when the China-Afghanistan Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership made the decision to grant Afghanistan by introducing a duty free treatment by gradually dismissing 95 percent of taxes on imported merchandise from Afghanistan (Zhao, 2014:5). This discharging of taxes was extended to include 97% of Afghan-originated goods in 2015. According to statistics from China Customs, Afghan export to China more than doubled in value than that in 2012 as a result of these important tariff privileges. In 2014-2015, commercial trade between the countries reached over a billion, which made China Afghanistan’s third biggest partner in trade, only behind Pakistan and India (Daohao, 2016).

In addition to this growing trade relationship, China is amongst the top investors in the country, amongst others in infrastructure, communications and extraction of mineral resources (Wishnick, 2014:134). In 2009, the state-owned company China Metallurgical Corporation (MCC) made the largest foreign direct investment in Afghanistan’s history. The company made a $3.5 billion investment in a project for the development of the Aynak copper mine in the eastern province of Logar, a deal which also included transport and electricity-generating facilities (Ng, 2010:6). With the mine holding roughly the equivalent of a third of China’s total copper reserves, it was estimated that this project alone would triple Afghan government mining revenues within five years through taxes and royalties (Farmer, 2009). China outbid its competitors by roughly a billion dollars and on top of that, the deal included promises to invest additional hundreds of millions in related infrastructure projects, all expected to
generate over 5,000 jobs. The project has been plagued by several setbacks, such as archeological findings at the site and contractual disagreements. However, with a 30-year lease over the site there is no rush and it is believed that the mine can eventually account for up to 40 per cent of the Afghan government’s revenue (Sharma, 2010:204). Another huge Chinese project in Afghanistan involves the county’s first oilfield auction in ten years in 2011, which was won by China National Petroleum Corporation. This bidding concerned the exploitation of Afghanistan's rich but undeveloped oil and national gas reserves in the Amu Darya basin in northeastern Afghanistan. The Chinese company once again outbid its competitors by far through an offer that included generous royalties of 15 percent, 70 percent on sale profits, corporate tax, land rent and a $30 million refinery: a deal that was predicted to bring the Afghan government over $7 billion in 25 years (Zhao, 2012:5). Most recently though, there are signs that China has embarked on its biggest investment adventure in Afghanistan as of yet, in the form of its One Belt, One Road initiative. Also described as China’s ‘Marshall Plan’, in 2013 President Xi Jinping officially unveiled this proposal for a massive trade and infrastructure networks that East Asia with Europe, thereby boosting economic development in those regions (Tiezzi, 2014). Mr. Pantucci underscores that the logic behind the western part of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative is also foremost aimed at achieving domestic stability in Xinjiang, by addressing economic development through a number of investments in the entire region (Interview R2:Q3).

The development strategy proposed by Xi Jinping works on connectivity and cooperation between the China and other countries in Eurasia. In its essence, it is really an umbrella-concept that incorporates a vision of regional connectivity, rather than a real project by itself. Dr. Gill also emphasizes that it is really the flagship of Xi Jinping’s greater vision of ‘rejuvenation’ of China, which is aimed to restore the central role of China as a power in Asia and beyond (Interview R3:Q3). In 2014, Chinese premier Li Keqiang stressed Afghanistan’s importance within this Silk Road project and said:

“As a shining pearl on the ancient Silk Road, Afghanistan holds an important geographical position as it connects South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia, bordering China to the east.” (FMPRC, 2014)

At the 2014 CICA Summit, President Karzai underlined his enthusiasm about the project:

“We endorse President Xi Jinping’s proposal for the continuance of development efforts for a Silk Road Economic Belt. The renewal and promotion of the Silk Road, of which Afghanistan is a part, will unleash unprecedented opportunities for regional cooperation and integration.” (Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2014)

Some concrete actions within that framework have taken already taken place, the Chinese and Afghan governments have for example been exploring possibilities for over 5 years, when they signed an agreement to study the feasibility of a rail and highway development from China towards Iran via Afghanistan back in 2009 (Bonesh, 2014). While initially met with resistance from involved countries, the project was deemed feasible and entered a very concrete stage in 2014 (Asia-Plus, 2012). In that year, the countries of China, Afghanistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Afghanistan signed an agreement to develop the regional
highway that also passes through six Afghan provinces (Ministry of Transport of Tajikistan, 2014). As a part of the broader Silk Road project, it is also being funded by the Asian Development Bank and Bank of China and the current multi-lateral agreement ensures that the five involved countries will have complete technical and economic assessments come mid-2016. Rightfully so, the Afghan Minister of Public Works stated that from an economic perspective, the One Belt, One Road project has major potential for both economic and social benefits to Afghanistan’s future (Ministry of Public Works Afghanistan, 2015).

At the same time though, Afghanistan does not quite see where it fits into Xi Jinping’s regional vision. Geographically speaking, there are several possible routes to gain access to Iran and West Asia. The discussion around Afghanistan’s involvement appears to focus on how it might develop into an extension or part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or through connections from Tajikistan extending into Afghanistan. It has been stated that China’s preference is for a traffic route via Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Iran because this route has the advantages of being short in distance (Zhao, 2016: 904). Plans that were introduced in 2016 however, actually seemed to bypass Afghanistan:

Source: China Investment Research

In May 2016, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the ‘One Belt One Road’ project was signed by the countries, in which Afghanistan welcomed the initiative and supported its implementation through Afghanistan (MFAIRA, 2016). In addition, Afghanistan announced to be willing to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which enables countries to actively participate in the construction of the OBOR Initiative (Dongmiao, 2016). This AIIB is a multilateral development bank which focuses on the development of infrastructure and other productive sectors in Asia. China is its biggest shareholder, and they believe that it will play a key role in the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative (Global Times, 2016). In June 2016, Liu

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17 Image derived from www.chinainvestmentresearch.org [accessed 24-06-16]
Jieyi, China's permanent representative to the United Nations made the following remarks at a Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan:

"We will integrate the Belt and Road Initiative with Afghanistan's national transition and development strategy, and we will continue to contribute to Afghanistan's early attainment of sustainable peace and development” (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2016).

However, this Memorandum still did not provide specifics on how to realize the goal of common development through pragmatic cooperation. Dr. van der Putten, who is conducting a research into the OBOR project also underscores that while China has already started with a number of OBOR initiatives in Pakistan and a number of Central Asian countries, as of now such investments are spare in Afghanistan (Interview R1:Q1). It therefore understandable that the specifics of Afghanistan’s role in the great Silk Road initiative remain rather vague and Afghans have yet to understand where exactly they fit into this grand vision for regional connectivity (Pantucci & Luo, 2015).

Under the framework of OBOR, China did promise Afghanistan to assist with the construction of a highway and rail constructions connecting Afghanistan to Pakistan and to help build a hydroelectric 1,500 megawatt dam on the Kunar River (FMPRC, 2015c). While referring to China motivation to support these initiatives, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying explicitly mentioned that ‘the rail track will help defeat the spectre of terror and extremism in the region by giving youth jobs that would leave no recruits for terror outfits’ (Heart of Asia, 2015). These investments are located in the Kunar region, which is one of Afghanistan’s most active battle areas up-to-date, with different sections of the Taliban actively operating close to the Pakistan border (Daniel, 2015). They are thus anything but risk-free, which illustrates the problems with the Chinese economic ‘grass-roots’ approach: economic investments can encounter, and indeed often have experienced, severe security complications. Most of the other major Chinese investments, including the Aynak copper mine, the Darya Basin Oil Field project and the railway link near Kabul have actually all been troubled by militant violence and even kidnappings of Chinese workers, as was the case in the Fayrab province in 2010 (Ng, 2010:6). Prospects about these security-related issues deterred other bidders from making huge investments in Afghanistan, and it has been argued that China’s willingness to take these well-known risks for huge ventures, is ‘most striking’ (Wines, 2009 and Kalil, 2016). The threat of insurgency groups, warlords and local militias to commercial projects is concrete and problematic and a deterrent for further Chinese investments and initiatives. This also holds up for Afghanistan’s dubious place within the OBOR project, as became clear during a meeting with the President Ghani in 2016, when top military official General Fang said that Afghanistan is of great important for the Chinese economic belt, but he added that terrorism is a ‘big threat’ to the project (Kilal, 2016). In similar fashion it was noticed that Afghanistan could play a dangerous potential spoiler role within the project, if the country were to truly collapse into chaos and become an exporter of instability (Pantucci & Luo, 2015a). Dr. Gill confirms that while there is also not so much to gain in Afghanistan as an economic entity through this project, this instability might be the most important aspect of China’s hesitant stance towards Afghanistan’s place in the One Belt, One Road (Interview R3:Q4).
8.4 Sustainable Security: Analysis

As described in the theoretical framework, the concept of ‘sustainable security’ is centered around the notion that development is the foundation of security. In order for security to be durable, economic progress and sustainable development is of elementary importance. In relation to China’s behavior in Afghanistan, the question is whether China helps Afghanistan gain greater economic independence. The first important observation is that authoritative Chinese officials frequently reiterate that China’s approach to Afghanistan is indeed embedded in the belief that economic progress is the key to Afghan security. This belief is repeatedly cited as the reason why China focuses on economic development as their key contribution to Afghanistan, instead of for example military intervention. This stance has been presented in speeches since the start of the war in Afghanistan up to date. The question whether this conviction was also put into practice, is examined by the use of the two prescriptive guidelines that were derived from the element of ‘sustainable security’.

1. China provides Afghanistan with (socio)-economic assistance

China has historically provided Afghanistan with modest amounts of developmental aid, but after 2014 it has made its biggest contribution up to date. In comparison to other countries, China’s contributions in terms of GDA are still very limited, also when taking into account the economic prowess of China itself. Another observation is that China prefers to offer aid that is mostly focused on reconstruction of infrastructure. Besides this direct form of aid, there are also a number of other Chinese initiatives that are aimed to promote socio-economic development, for example through projects that focus on education, medical and health care. When considering the very limited amount of aid that preceded 2014, the aid package of $327 million that China promised over the period of 2014-2017 is a significant upscale. Even though it could be downplayed in comparison to other countries’ contributions, it at the very least signals increased engagement. While the amount of gross developmental aid that China has actually spent on Afghanistan is modest, the alignment China’s conduct and this principle is significant because of the progress made. Therefore, these findings provide some indications that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (+).

2. China strengthens its economic ties with Afghanistan

In terms of economic relations, a first observation is that trade between the countries is on the rise, especially because of a number of tax privileges that Beijing assigned to Afghanistan. These changes were already introduced in 2010, but further intensified in 2015. More importantly, it is obvious that China prefers to contribute to Afghanistan’s reconstruction via investments. The development of several mega-projects before 2014, amongst which the Aynak copper mine and the oil field exploitation project of Amu Darya, illustrate that this type of assistance has been central to China’s involvement in Afghanistan for quite some years. The introduction of the One Belt, One Road initiative can herald a new chapter in this regard. Several steps have already been taken and full implementation of the project could yield much prosperity to Afghanistan as a strategic hub between the East and West countries. However, there are some caveats when it comes to the exact benefits from the OBOR project for Afghanistan. Most importantly, while prospects might be promising, just a few concrete
steps have been undertaken and there remains uncertainty about Afghanistan’s specific place within Xi Jinping’s grand vision. While the country indeed holds a strategic geographical spot and could serve as ‘a centre of connectivity’, it is not ruled out that the OBOR for the greatest part bypasses Afghanistan. The question is whether Beijing will be willing to use OBOR as a way to stabilize Afghanistan or unwilling to incorporate the country in OBOR exactly because of this instability. While China has made bigger commercial investments than any other country in Afghanistan, the success of these projects has not yet materialized. Chinese investments in Afghanistan have experienced trouble from the outset and the threat to these and further investments is far from diminished. It is a positive sign that China is willing to embark on investments that are anything but risk-free, but absence of commercial success and the continuing security problems are not providing China with incentives to continue on this path. In sum, China has made vast economic commitments to Afghanistan, but there is much uncertainty about the One Belt, One Road initiative, which provides Afghanistan with a vast array of economic opportunities and can thus truly be a long-term ‘game-changer’. There are signs that in the period after 2014 China’s economic engagement in Afghanistan has been deepening, but there have not yet been much concrete steps in Afghanistan under the OBOR framework. Therefore, these findings provide some indications that China applies this principle in post-2014 Afghanistan (+).

Table 7: Findings Sustainable Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>China provides Afghanistan with (socio)-economic assistance</em></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>China strengthens its economic ties with Afghanistan</em></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter IX: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The timeline of this research began with the announced withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan. In the year 2014 Operation Enduring Freedom, which became synonymous to the war in Afghanistan, came to an official end. A full withdrawal was delayed, so the early suggestions that this would result in a ‘security vacuum’ were out of proportion. Concerns about stability in Afghanistan on the other hand are very well-founded. Over the last years, violence had only increased and insurgent groups have steadily gained not only influence, but territory as well. While the Afghan Security Forces gained full security responsibility in 2014, it is obvious that they would remain very dependent on external support.

With a decreasing western security footprint in the country, soon speculations arose about China’s willingness to take on a bigger role in helping to promote Afghanistan’s of stability. There were multiple reasons for Beijing to become more engaged with the country, of which the most important motivation is the desire to maintain stability in the province of Xinjiang. The direct links between terrorist groups in Afghanistan and the Uyghur insurgents, combined with the fear of ideological encouragement of Islamic extremism in the region are a cause of concern for Beijing. Terrorist and militant activity in Afghanistan also poses a threat to a number of big investments that China had already made in the country. This simultaneously discourages China from starting future commercial projects it would like to initiate, for example under the banner of the One Belt, One Road plan. Not only would Afghan stability be favorable for the economic belt road, but it would also enable China to further invest in the exploitation of Afghanistan’s riches of natural resources. Finally, geopolitical motivation to boost Beijing’s position as a regional power could also provide an incentive.

It was also in 2014 that Xi Jinping publicly presented the ‘New Asian Security Concept’. The ‘New Asian Security Concept’ has a long history in Chinese foreign policy thinking and the latest administration made clear that it attaches a great deal of importance to the concept in its foreign policies. The combined elements of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security provided the blueprint of China’s contemporary view on security in international relations. Over two years have passed since President Xi Jinping introduced the New Asian Security Concept and the Afghan Security Forces gained full security responsibility, which was the motivation to evaluate China’s behavior in Afghanistan in the light of these two developments. Accordingly, the question that guided this research was: To what extent does China apply the principles of the New Asian Security Concept in post-2014 Afghanistan?

The objective of this research was to add to our knowledge about China’s role in international security by examining the specific role of China in the stability and security of Afghanistan, and by examining the practical relevance of the New Asian Security Concept. In this chapter, some concluding observations per element of the New Asian Security Concept will be discussed, an overall conclusion will be presented and this conclusion will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework.
9.2 Research Findings

The research started with an examination of China’s contributions in the field of common security, which centers around the notion that countries must have respect for other countries legitimate rights, interests and sovereignty. This is strongly embedded in the old ‘non-interference’ principle, because countries should abstain from interfering in other nations internal affairs and respect their independence and territorial integrity. This principle had a strong influence on China’s foreign policy in Afghanistan before 2014, which was mostly defined by non-action. China refrained from involvement with the war in Afghanistan and was minimally involved with the internal conflict between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Afghanistan witnessed a steady resurgence of the group’s power in the years up until 2014, which led to the political reality of the necessity to negotiate about peace with the Taliban insurgents. Interestingly, findings suggest that since 2014, China was willing to take on an active mediating role in the so-called ‘reconciliation process’. The talks were unsuccessful throughout 2015 and further attempts also yielded no results. This increased involvement of China in Afghanistan’s internal conflict stands in contrast to its previous stance. In a same manner, it appears that China became more open to the need of international involvement in the country. In sum, the Chinese tried to strike a balance between emphasizing Afghanistan’s sovereignty on the one hand, while opening up to international involvement with Afghan domestic affairs on the other hand. Throughout 2014 and 2015, the Afghan government has stated that it welcomed China’s mediating efforts and this could thus not be interpreted as an infringement of the country’s sovereignty. A visit by the Taliban to China in late 2016, led to the first reports of some frictions in that regard. There are similar concerns that China’s increased willingness to negotiate with not only the Taliban, but also other insurgent groups can in the future let the Kabul regime feel disregarded.

The second part of the New Asian Security Concept is comprehensive security, which meant to uphold security in both traditional and non-traditional fields, like included terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental security, cyber security, energy and resource security. The most important security threats to Afghanistan are the interconnected issues of terrorism, insurgency and the narcotics industry, problems which have all intensified over the last years. In the period after 2014, an increase in bilateral exchanges suggests that China has indeed given more importance to Afghan security. There was also an increase in the actual concrete support to Afghan security forces, which mainly occurred through ‘soft’ security assistance in the form of training and equipment. Most notable was the military aid package that exceeded any previous type of assistance. Afghanistan’s public support for China’s fight against the East Turkistan Islamic Movement underlines that China’s main focus in its security relations with Afghanistan lies on the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, extremism and separatism. When compared to the period before 2014, China’s security engagement with Afghanistan has been taken to a next level and domestic security issues definitely seem to be the most important factor that contributed to this development. However, while this is definitely a significant improvement of China’s contributions, it simultaneously is just a modest step forward. There is, for example, little proof of actual bilateral security cooperation, which is mostly limited to diplomatic discussions and commitments that result in little concrete actions. This could be explained by the fact that China prefers to nurture
relationships not only with the Kabul regime, but also with other relevant parties in Afghanistan, of which the Taliban is the most important. If China fully commits itself to the central government in Kabul, this will bring harm to its status-quo relationship with the Taliban, which in turn could backfire on the situation in Xinjiang. Taking this into consideration, the recent military aid package is a first step towards a strong public endorsement of the central government. In relation to the concept of ‘comprehensive security’, China’s conduct in Afghanistan since 2014 is thus determined by cautious, but significant steps forward.

The third element of the New Asian Security Concept, cooperative security, is about promoting the security of both individual countries and the region as a whole through dialogue and cooperation. Security issues should be addressed through cooperation and all parties should be welcomed to play positive and constructive roles towards that end. Before 2014, China’s cooperation with other countries on Afghanistan was very limited. Beijing was unwilling to participate in the ISAF mission and hesitant to provide any sort of assistance to their intervention and limited its contribution to participation in diplomatic discussions at multilateral platforms like The Heart of Asia and the International Conference on Afghanistan. After 2014, there appears to have been a shift towards more international cooperation on the Afghan issue, which becomes apparent in official speeches, but more importantly also in China’s participation and even initiation of multilateral discussion platforms. Most notably are the Afghan-Taliban reconciliation efforts, which include both Pakistan and the U.S. as other external actors. Due to their strong relationship, China managed to bring Pakistan to the table to participate in the peace talks. However, Pakistan might need stronger convincing to take concrete steps in its efforts to crack down on the Taliban. While this might be crucial for Afghan security, it is questionable whether China is willing to pressure Pakistan even further on that matter. China’s intensified cooperation with the U.S. in Afghanistan since 2014 through multiple ‘peace and reconciliation’ efforts and other initiatives is noteworthy, as the two countries have previously refrained from such public cooperation in Afghanistan. Considering tensions between the powers elsewhere, this is a strong endorsement of China’s willingness to cooperate in Afghanistan. In addition, the efforts of China to put the Afghan issue at the top of the agenda of the SCO, the fresh impetus China provided to the ‘Heart of Asia’ Istanbul Process and the various initiations of multilateral talks with Iran, India and Russia about Afghanistan are all signs that suggest that China is indeed putting the ‘Cooperative Security’ concept into practice in Afghanistan.

The final part of the New Security Concept, sustainable security is centered around the notion that development is the foundation of security. In order for security to be durable, economic progress and sustainable development is of elementary importance. With Chinese authoritative stressing that China’s approach to Afghanistan is indeed embedded in the belief that economic progress is the key to Afghan security, it was examined to what extent China actually helps Afghanistan gain greater economic independence. In terms of gross developmental aid, the aid package of $327 million that China promised over the period of 2014-2017 is a significant upscale in comparison to the amount of aid that preceded 2014. However, even when including this package, China’s contributions in Afghanistan in terms of aid are modest, especially in comparison to other countries. Another important observation is that China’s assistance is mostly targeted at the reconstruction of Afghanistan through
infrastructure projects, for example by constructing roads, railways, irrigation projects and hospitals. To a lesser extent, Beijing also promotes socio-economic initiatives that focus on education, training on professionals in a number of fields and cultural exchanges between the countries. This type of assistance has also been central to China’s involvement in Afghanistan before 2014, as illustrated by the initiation of several mega-projects. The introduction of the One Belt, One Road initiative can elevate economic relations between Beijing and Kabul to the next level. The project could bring unprecedented economic opportunities to Afghanistan, but this is very much dependent on the exact place that Afghanistan will get within the OBOR framework. Chinese hesitations in that regard are also the result of the danger of Afghan security threats to commercial endeavors in Afghanistan, especially since previous investments have been troubled from the outset. Summing up, while there are definite signals that China is willing to commit itself further to Afghanistan’s economic reconstruction, Beijing once again applies a cautionary approach.

In the table below, the findings outlined above are schematically presented in relation to the indicators of the New Asian Security Concept:

**Table 8: Research Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Element</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Security</td>
<td><strong>China does not interfere with Afghanistan’s internal political affairs</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China respects Afghanistan’s territorial integrity</strong></td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China’s actions in Afghanistan are the result of close consultation with the Afghan government, in full respect of its sovereignty</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Security</td>
<td><strong>China contributes to the capabilities of Afghan security forces to address its main security issues independently</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China strengthens its bilateral security cooperation with Afghanistan to address common security challenges</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Security</td>
<td><strong>China welcomes other countries to play a constructive role in promoting Afghanistan’s security</strong></td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China actually cooperates with other countries in Afghanistan to promote stability</strong></td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China promotes cooperation to address Afghanistan’s main security challenges through multilateral efforts and organizations</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Security</td>
<td><strong>China helps Afghanistan with sustainable socio-economic development through assistance</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China strengthens its economic relationship with Afghanistan</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
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9.3 Concluding Remarks

Taking all these findings into account, a number of concluding remarks can be made in relation to the research question. The main conclusion is that the findings in the table above are suggesting that China applied the principles of the New Asian Security Concept to Afghanistan to a modest, but significant extent.

To begin with, there are no violations of any principle of the New Asian Security Concept. There were only two indicators in relation to which the findings did not result in a confirming evaluation. The first one is related to the principle of non-interference. This is not necessarily a negative evaluation, but this finding simply suggests that China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan underscores that a strict interpretation of the non-interference principle is no longer compatible with the reality of Chinese foreign policy. Beijing’s involvement with the reconciliation talks is at the very least involvement with another country’s domestic political affairs, and an indication that Beijing itself is normalizing a more flexible interpretation of this old principle. The only other neutral score was related to the lack of actual bilateral security cooperation between the two countries to address common security challenges. In that regard, a mitigating factor is that the level of diplomatic exchanges on security matters has increased significantly.

Secondly, most actual Chinese contributions to Afghanistan’s stability can be described as modest in comparison to other countries and when taking into consideration how much more China could provide. At the same time, when compared to Chinese assistance in the period prior to 2014, several important steps have been made and a steady in actual support to Afghanistan can be observed after 2014. Therefore these contributions can be described as modest, but at the same time significant. This goes for Beijing’s economic aid and investments, which cannot yet be described as ‘a huge’ commercial role but definitely as work in progress. China’s economic aid package that was announced in 2014 is a big step forward in comparison to previous assistance, but it still is modest in comparison to other countries. Much will depend on China’s projections of the feasibility of a greater role for Afghanistan in the One Belt, One Road project, since this could play a big role, but the place of Afghanistan in OBOR as of yet is too uncertain. China’s increased assistance to the Afghan security forces is another example of the relevance to not only compare China’s role with other countries, but also to review Sino-Afghan relations prior to 2014. China’s wariness of full-fledged support to the central government out of fear for unintended negative consequences in Xinjiang led China to provide ‘token-ish’ support to the forces before 2014. The recent military aid package, while once again not that big in scale, is an important first step in the direction of direct security engagement. These developments are thus all modest and the result of a cautionary approach, but nonetheless important improvements.

Finally, there are also some prime examples of China’s willingness to put the principles of this concept into practice in post-2014 Afghanistan. These are all related to China’s readiness to welcome and even promote other players to contribute to Afghan security. The fact that Beijing urged Pakistan to get involved with the reconciliation talks is a strong testament to this stance, and the cooperation with the U.S. on this and other issues is especially confirming.
The case of post-2014 Afghanistan illustrates that China is perfectly capable of cooperating with other countries on security issues, even if there are significant tensions between these countries elsewhere.

In sum, there are no conclusive findings that suggest that China does not uphold the principles of the New Asian Security Concept and some conclusive indications that Beijing is converging these principles into concrete actions. Most of the indications underscore a cautionary application of these principles that could be described as both modest and significant at the same time. It is modest in comparison to other countries, but significant in comparison to previous efforts and contributions.
Chapter X: Discussion

This final Chapter starts with reflections related to the theoretical and societal relevance of this research. In addition, some methodological limitations will be discussed and finally, suggestions for future research will be made.

10.1 Reflections: China’s role in International Security

The concluding findings about the alignment between China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan and the New Asian Security Concept will serve as a spring-board for reflections. In relation to the theory on China’s role in international security, a number of observations can be made.

The New Asian Security Concept: Rhetorical message or blueprint for action?

First of all, these findings counter speculations that the New Asian Security Concept entailed little actionable intent. In the case of post-2014 Afghanistan, China did put the principles of this concept into action to an extent that illustrates that the New Asian Security Concept is not only of rhetorical value.

Regarding this rhetorical message, there were suggestions that the New Asian Security Concept was merely a geopolitical message aimed to challenge the U.S.’ role in Asia. This interpretation seems too simplistic when considering the case of post-2014 Afghanistan. China’s stance on the U.S.’ presence in Afghanistan is ambivalent, because it appreciates that their presence keeps the country relatively stable, but Beijing simultaneously fears long-term ‘encircling’ intentions. In addition, China was actually cooperating with the U.S. in Afghanistan and willing to step up this cooperation in recent years, despite intensifying bilateral tensions elsewhere. This illustrates that China is not blind-sided by geopolitics, but rather a pragmatic and mature nation that is capable of cooperating with other partners despite possible bilateral tensions. Such cooperation does not suggest that China wants to ‘get rid of the U.S in Asia’. When examining the U.S.- China relations in Asia, these findings actually highlight an aspect of intensified cooperation between the two countries. This might deserve more attention and recognition when considering that much (academic) attention goes out to tensions between the two powers elsewhere on the continent.

Others suggested that the New Asian Security Concept was foremost aimed to highlight the centrality of China in Asia and to promote its international image. In the case of post-2014 Afghanistan, arguments that such motives played a role in China’s involvement seem more valid. The Chinese role in the reconciliation talks is as high-profile as regional politics in Central Asia can be. China’s mediating role even gets international recognition. In addition, during international diplomatic exchanges, such as the Heart of Asia conferences, Beijing has not shied away from highlighting its contributions to Afghanistan and urging other countries to do the same. This could be perceived as China (frames its role as) trying to take leadership in a major regional security issue, thereby trying to boost its international stature.
China Threat vs China’s Peaceful Development

Discussions about the New Asian Security Concept directly relate to broader debates about China’s role in international security. These debates are dominated by perspectives that either promote China’s Peaceful Development or advocate the China Threat theory. As mentioned earlier, proponents of the last ‘China Threat’ perspective often emphasize the disputes in the Chinese seas when examining China’s behavior in Asia. In recent years, it was argued, China keeps moving away from the ‘keeping a low profile’ mantra that prescribed a strategy aimed to avoid trouble in foreign relations. The territorial issues in the seas are highlighted as examples of China’s move away from their previous inward focus towards a more assertive, or even aggressive, role in international relations that unsettled other countries. One could say that it is hard to find any arguments that the ‘China Threat’ theory holds up in the case of post-2014 Afghanistan. China’s role in the Afghan political processes does indicate that China is more willing to become involved with the external environment than before, but in this case such ‘assertive’ behavior can certainly not be described as aggressive. Quite on the contrary, this behavior is constructive to Afghanistan’s security and could thus rather be described as a benign or positive type of activism. The developments in Afghanistan therefore illustrate that China’s move away from the low-profile doctrine does not necessarily involve or result in threatening behavior, but that Beijing might also be more willing to take on more active roles to promote international security and stability in other countries. This is not to say that this is merely the result of China’s altruistic concerns about the well-being of the Afghan people. After all, it appears that China is mostly looking to prevent that Afghanistan becomes a bigger destabilizing force to the region of Xinjiang. From this perspective, it could be argued that Beijing is not necessarily concerned with Afghanistan’s prosperity for the sake of the Afghans, but rather with the effect of deteriorating Afghan stability on China’s domestic stability. In other words, China is also, or even foremost, willing to get externally involved in order to protect or serve its own national interests. In Afghanistan this certainly seems true so some extent, but at the same time this could be described as the type of ‘win-win cooperation’ that the New Asian Security Concept prescribes. The most important observation is that in post-2014 Afghanistan, China demonstrates a willingness to get actively involved with its external environment in a manner that is constructive to international security. Therefore, this research suggests that Beijing’s conduct in that country is more in line with the ‘Peaceful Development’ hypothesis.

The Chinese Approach to ‘Peace-building’

A final observation is related to the discussions about the difference between the Chinese and western approaches to ‘peace-building’. While western approaches incorporate a focus on the promotion of values, through institution-building and democratization, the Chinese model was believed to focus on ‘no strings attached ‘economic reconstruction, for example through investments in infrastructure. The focus on economic progress in the New Asian Security Concept and the findings about China’s conduct in Afghanistan both confirm that this is the main distinction between these approaches. At the same time, the case of post-2014 Afghanistan also illustrates some of the tensions and even limitations that are inherent to this Chinese approach to promote security.
As described earlier, one of the points of emphasis of the New Asian Security Concept is the perspective that economic development is the foundation of security. It is the second part of this verb, that security is the prerequisite of economic development which is so problematic when it comes to the implementation of the New Asian Security Concept in Afghanistan. The decreasing western security footprint, the rise of the Taliban, the comeback of Al Qaeda and the recent arrival of Islamic State have all resulted in the fact that the security situation in Afghanistan has actually deteriorated over the past few years. Past Chinese commercial investments have already experienced many setbacks due to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. As a result China is hesitant to provide further investments that could help the country gain more economic independence. It seems very difficult to promote Afghanistan’s stability through commercial endeavors without tackling the security problems that could jeopardize this economic progress. In order for the economic development to set in, more security assistance is thus probably required. The problem is that China remains hesitant to provide this, not only because of the reluctance to provide military support out of principle but also because of the fear that this might backfire on domestic stability, most notably in Xinjiang. China is not looking to become a target for the Islamic terrorist groups by publicly endorsing the U.S.-backed Afghan government to the fullest. The One Belt, One Road initiative is the ultimate manifestation of this conundrum of the Chinese approach to Afghanistan. While the economic profits could indeed play a ‘huge’ role in the stabilization of Afghanistan, China is wary to fully incorporate Afghanistan into the project due to the security challenges. On the one hand, trade routes through Afghanistan would benefit the long-term stability of the country and the wider region. On the other hand, Afghanistan’s eminent security threats pose a direct and present danger to the implementation of that mega-initiative. In the case of Afghanistan, overall security is so worrisome that it is questionable whether economic investments alone will prove to be enough to promote stability in the country, if such external support does not incorporate a security component. Security and economy are certainly intertwined, but this interconnectedness also gets overlooked when applying an approach that focuses so heavily on the economic dimension.

There is another observation about China’s conduct in post-2014 Afghanistan in relation to ‘peace-building’. This case-study adds weight to the assumption that in recent years, the strict interpretation of the non-interference principle has made place for a more flexible one in Beijing. The mediating role in the ‘reconciliation efforts’ between the Taliban and the Afghan government is a form of direct involvement in Afghanistan’s domestic political affairs that does not seem to go hand in hand with the principle. By continuously highlighting Afghanistan’s sovereignty and ownership during the process, Beijing tries to ensure that their role is not perceived as interfering. However, this ‘peace-broker’ type of activism shows more willingness to get involved with the internal political affairs of other countries than before. Furthermore, this case illustrates that there might even arise tensions with this more ‘flexible’ interpretation of this principle on the one hand, and China’s desire to nurture relationships with important intra-state actors on the other hand. Ties or contact with such parties should at all times involve close coordination with the central government, since this could otherwise easily be interpreted as a violation to that nation’s sovereignty. Contact with insurgent groups without the government's knowledge and approval, for example to safeguard economic
interests, can be perceived as China seeking its own absolute security at the expense of another central government. Rumors about such possible frictions between China and the Afghan government in relation to a Taliban visit to Beijing illustrate that it is difficult to strike a balance between these two approaches.

**China and Afghanistan’s Future**

In terms of societal relevance, this research has shown the direction that China’s policy and conduct in Afghanistan is taking. From the Afghan perspective, these findings are promising and worrisome at the same time. For starters, China has multiple reasons to prevent Afghanistan from sliding into total chaos, both of economic, geopolitical and security nature. In addition, there are several developments that suggest China is already deepening its engagement with the war-torn country. Especially in the years that followed 2014, significant steps were made. At the same time, questions remain about the extent to which China will be willing to commit itself further in the following years, and what it is that Beijing can exactly provide. It seems that the reconciliation talks were China’s preferred option to try and bring stability to Afghanistan, but prospects on a peace settlement between the Taliban and the Kabul regime in the near future are fading. The biggest question is therefore whether China will really commit itself to the central government in Kabul. Despite recent legislature, the likelihood of Chinese military presence in Afghanistan is still very remote, but there is the possibility of more concrete military-minded support to the Afghan security forces. However, a full commitment to the (U.S.-backed) central government is likely to have negative side-effects in Xinjiang. This is the least desirable outcome of involvement in Afghanistan for Beijing, so instead China is probably going to continue to proceed with caution in Afghanistan. In that regard, economic development is still the approach that entails relatively low risk, with possible high pay-off. This means that China’s relevance to Afghanistan in the following years will probably to a great extent be determined by the question whether China is willing to take more risks by really incorporating Afghanistan into the One Belt, One Road initiative.

**10.2 Research Limitations**

As expected at the start if this research, the biggest operational limitation was the use of a scoring-system to assess the convergence between China’s actual conduct in Afghanistan and the New Asian Security Concept. While attempts have been made to give detailed explanations of the motivation that underlies the scores, this approach inevitably involved a certain level of subjective interpretation. On the other hand, this can also not be avoided if a research is aimed to evaluate the convergence between principles and actual conduct.

Another limitation is related to the efforts that were made to translate the principles into actionable indicators for research. Not all principles of the New Asian Security Concept were fit for examination through the analysis of the bilateral relationship between China and Afghanistan. In addition, the New Asian Security Concept is a very broad concept, which means that not all of its aspects can be analyzed to keep the research feasible. The impact of China’s regional security behavior on Afghanistan could not be assessed in its totality for example. Neither could an in-depth comparison at all times be provided. It would for example
be useful to provide more statistical information and analyses about the level of investments in Afghanistan in comparison Chinese investments in other (similar) countries. Not all of these aspects could be elaborated upon to a satisfying extent, because of the wide range of the concept. However, this is simultaneously the strength of the use of the New Asian Security Concept as a framework for analysis. Because it incorporates both negative and positive security behavior and entails a comprehensive view of security, it served as a solid theoretical framework through which to assess the largest part of China’s role as a security actor in post-2014 Afghanistan. This enabled reflections that are related to broader theoretical notions about China’s international security behavior and the Chinese approach to peace-building.

A final important limitation of the case of Afghanistan when it comes to generalizations is the fact that stability in Xinjiang seems to be such a large motivator for China’s involvement in Afghanistan. Due to the geographic proximity of the two countries, there will be few other countries where the security situation is so closely linked to domestic stability in China. On the other hand, there might be other ways in which China is invested in those countries. The fact that this is a key defining characteristic of Sino-Afghan relations simply underscores that this research is a case-study.

10.3 Suggestions for future research

An obvious suggestion for further research on this topic is to perform a similar research into China’s role in post-2014 Afghanistan in the (near) future. Since 2014, some interesting developments have taken place and this research provides more knowledge about the direction which China’s policies towards the country are taking. However, much more is to become clear in the following years. China’s role in Afghanistan will to a large part be determined by the questions whether the western footprint will continue to decrease, and whether Afghanistan will lapse into more chaos as a result of the increased power of insurgents. In addition, the future will tell more about the role of Afghanistan in the OBOR initiative, which is of much importance in Sino-Afghan relations. Finally, it will be interesting to see if China’s contact with the Taliban will harm its relation with the central government. These are incentives to keep a close eye on China’s role in Afghanistan in the following years.

In addition, it will be interesting to conduct similar studies that entail an examination of the New Asian Security Concept in other contexts. It is for example possible to examine the alignment between China’s conduct and this concept in an entire region, since this could involve all aspects of the framework. The obvious disadvantage would be the amount of research that such a project would involve. Another option would be to take a closer look at other (post)-conflict states, to see if this can lead to some generalizations.

A final suggestion for further research would be to examine the tension between the non-interference principle and China’s approach to maintain relations with important intra-state actors. This is especially relevant to other countries where the central government is being challenged by powerful groups, f.e. in several other (post)-conflict states. In the case of Afghanistan, China’s desire to nurture contact with important non-state groups was a cause of concern, since it could lead to tensions with respecting the sovereignty of the central government. It will be interesting to see whether China adopted similar approaches in other (post)-conflict states and if this led to sovereignty-related tensions elsewhere.
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Front Page Photo: *Taliban militiamen chant slogans as they drive toward the front line near Kabul in November 1997. (Photo: Courtesy Reuters)*, derived from [http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551](http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551)
Appendix 1: Interview Dr. F.P. van der Putten

Respondent 1: Dr. F.P. van der Putten  Interviewer: F.P. Dijksterhuis

Date: 27th of June, 2016

Q1: Wat kan u mij vertellen over het beleid van China in Afghanistan na 2014? I.v.m. het aankondigen van het terugtrekken van de NATO/US troepen?

Het was al redelijk snel duidelijk dat die ‘withdrawal’ niet zo abrupt zo gaan plaats vinden en dat er niet plots een vacuüum zou ontstaan, waar aanvankelijk over is gesproken. Ik denk dat China’s reactie hier op aansluit. China kijkt wel zeker meer actief naar de situatie in Afghanistan, maar het is niet zo dat het hele beleid is omgegooid. In principe gaat China door met wat ze voor 2014 ook deed, en dat is gewoon zo weinig mogelijk. Dit kan natuurlijk van alles zijn, maar ze zullen in ieder geval niet meer doen dan nodig is. Je zou ook kunnen zeggen dat ze zo weinig mogelijk risico nemen.

Hetzelfde geldt voor de economische kant van dit verhaal. Ik doe onderzoek naar het One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. Wat me opvalt is dat China veel investeert in Pakistan en ook de Centraal-Aziatische landen, maar slechts heel beperkt in Afghanistan. Ik denk dat dit ook te maken heeft met het willen mijden van risico. Juist omdat de veiligheidssituatie niet goed is, heeft China waarschijnlijk minder interesse om flink in Afghanistan te investeren. Dat is waarom het OBOR project toch voornamelijk om Afghanistan heen loopt.

Q2: Toch geeft China in relatie tot Afghanistan altijd aan dat ze een fervent voorstander zijn van de economische ‘grass-roots’ approach en daarmee ook bezig zijn. Ook geven ze vaak aan dat Afghanistan juist een belangrijke rol heeft binnen OBOR. Hoe ziet u dit?

Kijk naar de diplomatieke relaties van China met al de andere landen, daar zeggen ze precies hetzelfde: ‘jouw land is zo belangrijk voor onze zijderoute.’ Dit zeggen ze natuurlijk tegen iedereen. Uiteindelijk zie je dat er vooral met Pakistan concrete grote stappen worden genomen.

Q3: Hoe zit het dan met angst voor ‘spill-over’ effecten van de situatie in Afghanistan op andere landen in de regio, en daardoor ook concrete opties op het OBOR project?

Ja daar zijn wel zorgen voor, maar concrete opties om daar iets aan te doen zijn zeer beperkt voor China. Ze zouden heel veel steun kunnen geven aan de centrale regering van Afghanistan, maar het is allesbehalve zeker dat zij stabiliteit kunnen brengen in verband met de sterke Taliban en in dat verband is Pakistan ook erg belangrijk. Als China zou moeten kiezen, zouden ze gaan voor hun relatie met Pakistan. Zo is het ook zo dat China zich meer druk zal maken om de veiligheidssituatie in Pakistan dan in Afghanistan.

Q4: Maar de situatie in Afghanistan vereist misschien meer aandacht aangezien er toch een kritieke fase lijkt aan te komen met een Taliban die weer zeer in macht is toegenomen?

Ja en in dat geval denk ik dus dat China geen stappen zal ondernemen als dit ten koste zou gaan van die relatie met Pakistan. Pakistan is een belangrijke partner van China, heeft bovendien banden met Afghanistan en weer een andere, matige relatie met de Afghaanse
regering. Als er iets gaat gebeuren dan zal dit gezamenlijk met al die partijen moeten gebeuren.

Q5: Hoe ziet u de rol van China dan specifiek in het ‘reconciliation’ proces? Zeker met het oog op de diplomatieke bijeenkomsten die China heeft gefaciliteerd tussen die partijen?


China heeft daarnaast al erg lang contact met de Taliban, ook toen zij de macht hadden in Afghanistan. Het Chinese beleid wat dat betreft, en wat de laatste jaren alleen maar sterker is geworden is dat ze alle partijen te vriend willen houden. Waar dit eerst het geval voornamelijk was op statelijk niveau geldt dit nu ook interstatelijk. Dit betekend dus dat er vaker met grote rebellengroepen contact wordt onderhouden.

Q6: Is het gevaar van zo’n beleid niet dat je daardoor juist relaties beschadigt? Bijv. in het geval van het contact met de Taliban kan het op een gegeven moment misschien kwaad bloed zetten bij de Afghaanse regering?

Q6: Ja en daarom denk ik dus dat China uiteindelijk niet zo heel veel zal doen. China zal ten eerste ‘toestemming’ moeten krijgen van alle partijen om met de andere partijen te praten en mochten er dan gesprekken op gang komen dan wil China weinig op het spel zetten.

Q7: Hoe staat dit tot het non-interference principe, waarbij juist inmenging met zulke zaken werd voorkomen om zo geen verhoudingen te beschadigen?

Q7: Hier is dus wel wat van afgeweken, door wat lessen uit het recente verleden. Neem bijvoorbeeld de afscheiding van Zuid-Sudan. Daarbij had China aanvankelijk alleen goede verhoudingen met de centrale regering van Sudan. Achteraf hebben ze dus geconcludeerd dat ze daar al langer contact hadden moeten hebben met de rebellen in het Zuiden. Een ander geval is de val van Ghadafi in 2011, waar China wederom wel de banden had met de centrale regering van Ghadafi, maar niet met de groeperingen die vervolgens aan de macht kwamen. China had daar meerdere belangrijke investeringen en heeft dus de les getrokken dat je met alle belangrijke partijen contact dient te onderhouden, waarbij je probeert om hierbij de ‘originele’ relaties intact te houden. De invulling van het hele non-interference is dus wat dat betreft wel veranderd in de afgelopen tien jaar. Het is echt een kwestie van kansen spreiden.

Q8: Wat denkt u over de problematiek in Xinjiang in relatie tot Afghanistan? Is dit een belangrijke reden voor China om zich nog meer bezig te houden met Afghanistan?

Q8: Ja het is een groot probleem en dus ook motivering om zich met Afghanistan te bemoeien. China kan dan misschien niet erg veel doen, maar dit is een belangrijke ‘motor’. Ze willen in ieder geval niet betrokken raken bij een burgeroorlog, ze willen ook geen bombardementen of vergelijkbare militaire acties op gang zetten zoals de V.S., ook simpelweg om het imago van China international intact te houden. De aanpak is in principe om de regionale heerser te achterhalen en daar zaken mee te doen om de thuishaven veilig te stellen.
Q9: Denk u dat China met deze aanpak een succesvolle bijdrage levert aan de veiligheid in Afghanistan? Of denkt u dat er een grotere rol voor China is weggelegd?

Q9: Ik denk dat China’s invloed op Afghanistan wel zeker stabiliserend kan zijn, maar dan hebben we het over de lange termijn. China doet het voornamelijk diplomatiek en economisch wat dus lang zal duren. Dat China hierbij haar eigen belangen ook nastreeft, zoals de situatie in Xinjiang, lijkt geen nadelijk effect op te leveren voor Afghanistan. De rol van China is alleen beperkt en manifesteert zich heel geleidelijk. Ik denk dat ze zich niet een grotere rol zullen toe-eigenen, waarschijnlijk liever het tegenovergestelde. Aangezien de rol van Pakistan zo belangrijk is, is het voornaamste wat China kan doen, een situatie te creëren waarbij het voor Pakistan van belang is om zich actief met de stabiliteit in Afghanistan te bemoeien. Verder zal ze dus betrokken moeten blijven bij het aan tafel houden van alle partijen. Dat is sowieso een rol waar China steeds meer naar toe groeit, in het Midden-Oosten, Afrika en dus ook hier.

Q10: Hoe staat dit tot het China Threat vs the Peaceful Rise debat, welke discussie zich voornamelijk richt op de vraag of China enkel eigen belang en geopolitieke doelen nastreeft of juist daadwerkelijk een internationale orde wilt zien die gebaseerd is op ‘win-win cooperation’?

Q10: Het is natuurlijk sowieso eigenbelang, de vraag is alleen of het ten koste gaat van andere landen. Specifiek in het geval van Afghanistan denk ik dat het klopt dat dit een relatie is op basis van ‘win-win’, dit is bijvoorbeeld een heel ander geval dan de conflicten in de Chinese zeeën. Wat dat betreft is Afghanistan toch ook een minder ernstig probleem voor China. De instabiliteit in Xinjiang is dat wel degelijk, maar de rol van Afghanistan hierbij niet. Als je het bij elkaar optelt is Afghanistan dus geen ‘kern’ veiligheidsissue voor China.

Q11: Hoe zit het met de rol van China binnen multilaterale organisaties, zoals de SCO? Heeft daar veel verandering in plaats gevonden de afgelopen jaren?

Q11: Nogal belangrijk is dat Pakistan en India onlangs volledig lidmaatschap hebben verkregen binnen de SCO. Dit is een belangrijke stap omdat de SCO een heel andere omvang krijgt, waarbij ze de sprong maakt van een Centraal-Aziatisch veiligheidsplatform tot een grote regionale speler. De SCO is ook van belang als een officiële vorm van erkenning tussen China en Rusland om spanningen tussen die twee landen de kanaliseren. Qua invoed binnen de organisatie is het nu dus zeer interessant dat ze nu gezelschap krijgen van de andere regionale supermacht, India. De relevantie van de SCO is hiermee in ieder geval ondersteund en als de SCO een pan-aziatische vorm kan krijgen zoals de AIIB bijvoorbeeld, waarbij China achter de schermen nog wel veel macht heeft dan is dit natuurlijk erg prettige manier voor hen om regionale veiligheidsproblemen mee aan te pakken.

Q12: Wat zijn uw gedachtes over de verhoudingen tussen Rusland en ook de V.S. met China wat Afghanistan betreft?

Q12: Ik denk dat de Chinezen zich niet druk maken over Rusland. Ik denk dat Rusland niet meer echt grote belangen heeft in Afghanistan, zeker nu de Centraal Aziatische landen tussen Rusland en Afghanistan werken als een zekere buffer. Geopolitiek gezien is er dus minder belang voor Rusland. Wat de Amerikanen betreft heeft China wel vanaf 2001 aangegeven dat ze zich omsingeld voelden, maar ik geloof dat de Chinezen het toen niet als een erg grote dreiging zagen en het in principe wel best vonden dat de V.S. zijn handen vol had met de situatie in Afghanistan. De rivaliteit tussen de V.S. en China is wat dat betreft niet naar voren gekomen in Afghanistan. Eigenlijk heeft de Amerikaanse activiteit in Afghanistan en later in
Irak zelfs bijgedragen aan een verbetering van de relatie tussen China en de V.S., aangezien China zich minder bedreigd voelde doordat de Amerikanen militair gezien de handen vol had.

Q13: Wat denkt u over de investeringen die China in Afghanistan heeft gedaan?

Q13: De problemen die zijn ondervonden met bijvoorbeeld de Aynak kopermijn zijn natuurlijk weinig motivatie voor het investeren in meer projecten. China had bijvoorbeeld meer investeringen in Irak, wat ook kwam omdat olie toch een nog belangrijke grondstof is dan bijvoorbeeld koper.

Q14: Wat denkt u dat de Afghaanse regering elf denkt over de rol van China?

Q14: Ik denk dat Afghanistan zelf wel veel hoopt te verwachten van China, zowel op het gebied van economische investeringen als bij het onder druk zetten van Pakistan. Het feit dat President Ghani zijn eerste officiële buitenlandse bezoek had gepland naar Beijing zegt veel wat dat betreft.

Q15: Aangaande het ‘New Asian Security Concept’, neemt dit een belangrijke rol in binnen het Chinese buitenlandse beleid?

Q15: Ja ik denk dat dit een belangrijk is, ook omdat China behoefte heeft aan dergelijke richtlijnen. Het kwam in de eind jaren ’90 als een tegenreactie op het dominante geopolitieke denken. Binnen dit denken steunt China de rol van de VN en staat vooral de gedachte ‘niet tegen maar met andere landen’ centraal. Toch zie je dat er toch ook dat in Chinees beleid weer een rol komt voor het oude geopolitieke denken door spanningen met de V.S., zeker ook met wat er gaande is met de conflicten op zee.

Q16: Denkt u dat deze toename in spanning geen effect zal hebben op de situatie in Afghanistan?

Q16: Nog niet heel erg nee, die focus op geopolitiek speelt zich veel meer af in Oost-Azië en dat heeft zich nog niet uitgebreid naar het Westen. Dit kan uiteindelijk nog wel gebeuren, maar daarbij zal Afghanistan zelf een kleine rol spelen omdat het te instabiel is. Strategisch gezien zal het sowieso geen serieuze ‘speler’ zijn in deze geopolitiek en eigenlijk is Afghanistan ook niet een dergelijk grote dreiging voor een van de beide landen dat het in het centrum zal komen te staan van spanningen.

Q17: Ten slotte, wat denkt u dat de situatie van post-2014 Afghanistan ons kan vertellen over de veranderende rol van China in de internationale betrekkingen?

Q17: Ten eerste dus de subtiele verandering van de betrokkenheid van China, waarbij ze nog steeds zo min mogelijk betrokken wil raken maar wel bereid is om zich met interne politieke verhoudingen te bemoeien. Ten tweede dus de divergentie dat China in het Oosten van Azië eigenlijk heel scherp optreedt tegen de V.S. terwijl zij in andere delen van de wereld, en zo dus ook in Afghanistan alle betrokken partijen te vriend willen houden, zo ook Amerika. En ten slotte, hoewel er dus een link is tussen de situatie in Xinjiang en Afghanistan, denk ik dat China de stabiliteit van Afghanistan dus niet als een extreem groot gevaar ziet. Ze kijken wat er mogelijk is, maar zullen niet te veel op het spel willen zetten.
Appendix 2: Interview R. Pantucci

Respondent: R. Pantucci    Interviewer: F.P. Dijksterhuis
Date: 27th of July, 2016

Mr. Pantucci is Director of International Security Studies at the London-based think-tank Royal United Services Institute for Defence & Security Studies (RUSI). Prior to this, he enjoyed positions at International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) and he is the co-founder of ‘Young China Watchers’, a network organization focused on China. His research primarily focuses on China’s role in Central-Asia and counter-terrorism. At the moment, he is completing a research project that examines Chinese interests in Central Asia. As a result, he has conducted a significant amount of research in to China’s role in Afghanistan. His full body of work can be seen on the following website: https://raffaellopantucci.com/.

Q1: What are your thoughts about the New Asian Security Concept, do you consider it ‘new’, relevant in a practical way or maybe just mere rhetoric?

Q1: The Chinese excel at this kind of rhetoric, they like to have these big proclamations and vision of ‘big power dynamics’. The New Asian Security Concept is really a typical Chinese approach, but I consider the interesting part to be the practicality of the concept. In relation to what China is actually doing it should be noted that from a security perspective, what China is actually doing is a gradual normalization of its role as a security actor in the world.

Q2: How do you think this relates to the ‘old’ debate about China’s peaceful development vs the China threat theory?

Q2: I think from a Chinese perspective, there is of course the non-interference principle that prescribes that China does not meddle with internal affairs of countries, but the reality is that that principle really clashes with the reality of China’s role in the world. China is actually playing a very substantial role in influence in both security, political and economic terms in a number of different countries. Actually is China is thus really moving into that space, and I would argue that this is just the normalization of China’s role in the world. China is second largest economy in the world, soon to be number one, biggest trading partner of a lot of countries, huge amount of FTI flowing out, massive companies, so you are dealing with a huge actor with international interests. And with these interests, it makes perfect sense that there is a security component. Also to be able to secure those interest, both in terms of protecting it from non-state actors, but also in terms of making sure you are operating in a stable environment which allows you to do business. So I think China’s changing role in international security is just normalization, I think the problem is really the way that this happens, in again a very Chinese way. This means a very slow, gradual and quiet sort of change. You can see that the PLA has not fight a war in a very long time, but at the same time that is not to say that Chinese troops are not being employed around the world. If you think about the steady escalation of the Chinese participation in UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, including increasingly aggressive ones. Also if you look at the counter-terrorism legislation which enables Chinese soldiers to operate externally. In addition, if you look at the
increase of Chinese operations under the mandate of the SCO, which allowed Chinese troops to in some kind of way really test new equipment in a non-threatening way, for example to perform out-of-nation bombings and deploy drones. These types of context provide opportunity for escalation of security capabilities without being perceived as aggressive. The other part of the equation is the increase of Chinese police forces around the world and the sort of bilateral activity, for example through wildlife trafficking and smuggling, operations to crack down on corruption: all series of activity that China is slowly moving into the security space and increasing its role. To me that’s the part that people interpret as the ‘China threat’: all of this happening in a really covert way. If we look at the Chinese seas, you can see that China is clearly militarizing into that space, but they do it by building stuff and sending out coastguard ships and fishing vessels that look an awful lot like destroyers. They do it in a manner which appears very covert, fueling the ‘China threat’. From my perspective, these are often legitimate security activities, for a country that is growing with such as global footprint, it makes sense that there comes a security presence with that. But if you follow that logic of size, this means that you will one day look at one country with the biggest and most powerful army, simply because it will be the biggest country around, not to discount India but China looks to be much farther down that path.

Q3: So if we accept that there is a gradual move away from the non-interference principle, would you consider this predominantly motivated by economic interest? In the specific context of Afghanistan for example, would the main reason for China to get involved in its security is of economic nature, like the One Belt One Road initiative and the mineral resources that country has to offer?

RP3: I think from a Chinese perspective, the reason that they are interested in Afghanistan is a combination of things. On the one hand, there is the ‘hard’ security question: they are worried about the Uyghurs who fled to Afghanistan and hide out there or will even use it as a base to launch attacks on China. I think they are concerned about the fact that they share a direct border. The economic impact is complicated, because at its roots it is about domestic stability in Xinjiang, which is also being addressed through economic development through a number of investments in that region. At the same time, if you want to develop that region, you will have to develop regions around it, because it is very landlocked and far away. This is where the logic from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is derived from, and the logic of the OBOR project. This is mostly the need to open up the West beyond Xinjiang in order to provide routes for it to go. This is the overriding principle behind this, and thus fundamentally economic, but it is very tied up to security. Not only in the fact that economic development equals stability, but also because Afghanistan could in the future become deeply unstable, exporting instability north and south. Than Afghanistan could be interrupting the projects of both the OBOR and the CPEC. In addition, China would clearly be interested in Afghanistan’s resources, but this is also a question of what they need at what time. At the moment, copper prices are for example to low to give the Mes Aynak coppermine much priority, energy prices are getting better but are also still pretty low. The extraction argument is thus present, but probably not the principle one.

Q4: You already mentioned the increase in tensions in the South and East Chinese seas, what do you think about China’s active mediating role in the ‘reconciliation talks’ and specifically the enhanced cooperation with America in that regard?

Q4: I think that is indeed really interesting, and I think it shows pragmatism from both sides. On the one hand the very tense relationship in much parts of the world, while on the other hand this close operation in Afghanistan, not only in the peace talks, but also with the joint
training missions for Afghan diplomats. There is a fascinating story here, it speaks to the fact that these are two mature nations that can have confrontations and a functioning relations at the same time.

Q5: What do you think about the reconciliation talks in general and China’s role therein?

Q5: I think they haven’t achieved much, there has not been much progress. I do think the Americans are happy to see China take on such a pro-active role, because there is a desire to be done with Afghansitan and move on. If China can step in as a player with a strong relationship with Pakistan, which has a huge influential role in Afghanistan than maybe there is finally some prospect on resolving this issue. But I think there in the U.S. there is a positive feeling about this and a desire for more to happen, but the question becomes: is China really able to deliver anything in Afghanistan? I’m not totally sold on that, also because I cannot think of another situation where China has been an effective peace broker and it’s a very difficult role to play and other countries have failed repeatedly. I don’t know if I can see China, who’s still trying to figure out its role in the world, to provide the answer to this question.

Q6: These talks with the Taliban have not been very successful, so looking forward, do you think China is looking for other ways to ensure stability in Afghanistan? And then probably in the economic sphere or also military, considering the recent military aid package?

Q6: The military package was basically non-lethal equipment, I think the Chinese are frankly hedging when it comes to Afghanistan. You can see that they continue to try to help with the talks, but they are not able to force anything through it. They are offering a certain amount of support to the ANA and the ANSF and the Afghan government, they are keeping their economic investments kind of pottering along without any clear evidence of them making a bigger commitment, they are being wary about prior investments, they are building relationship with pretty much every party around: the Taliban, Pakistan and every faction in Kabul. They build such a set of relationships that they are friends with everyone, or at least have contact with them all.

Q7: Do you think this strategy of keeping friendly relationships with pretty much every party is maybe undermining the stability in Afghanistan because it makes Beijing wary to fully commit to the Kabul regime?

Q7: The question to me is: what more could they do? I am beginning to wonder what more Beijing can actually do, they have done efforts to bring the Pakistan to the table, they have some ‘token-ish’ support to the Afghan government, surely they could invest a lot more into the country. But than they would worry about the destabilizing consequences of it. I don’t think China is taking a leadership role and because they are unwilling to do that this results in some movement forward but not enough.

Q8: It’s a complicated situation in Afghanistan, but do you think stability in the country is of high priority to Beijing?

Q8: I don’t think its Beijing’s top priority, Xi is probably more concerned about the seas and the relationship with the U.S. But I think they do not want the country to become unstable that it causes problems around their borders. So they don’t want total anarchy there, but if its some unresolved issues that potters along for a long time I think they are fine with that, out of the assessment that when they are just being patient thing will eventually settle down.
Q9: Do you think the steps that China has taken in Afghanistan in the last couple of years are a deviation from the non-interference principle and in line with the broader development of China’s international security role?

RP9: I think they are, I think they are. But I’m not sure that I would say this is a-typical, this is increasingly the norm for China, to become a much more active player in international security affairs. I think that Afghanistan and Sudan before that, illustrates that idea of China as a non-interfering international is simply no longer true.

Q10: Finally, what do you think about the exact place of Afghanistan in the One Belt One Road project?

Q10: I am not quite sure there is clearly one, for a long time Afghanistan was mainly considered as a destabilizing influence to the route. Over time I think they do welcome its role, but that is because it is really a umbrella-concept rather than a real project. But if you do look at the projects on the ground, they frankly do go around Afghanistan. So the role is unclear at the moment.

Q11: At last, there was a big terrorist attack of the IS in Afghanistan just several days ago. While the Chinese considers the Taliban to be a political force that needs to be reckoned with, possibly even as taking over power sometime in the future, the Islamic State is really considered a terrorist organization. Do you think this might motivate China to enhance its counter-terrorism cooperation with the central government?

Q11: I would be surprised, simply because its unclear what IS in Afghanistan really is. We don’t know if its an organization that is tied to the central roots in Syria and Iraq, or maybe more the result of tensions within the Taliban or even with neighbors. We don’t know what the IS really is, and I don’t think this will change the calculus from Beijing’s perspective.
Appendix 3: Interview Dr. B. Gill

Respondent 3: Dr. B. Gill  Interviewer: F.P. Dijksterhuis

Date: 28th of July, 2016

Dr. Gill, currently Professor of Asia-Pacific Strategic Studies at the Australian National University is an internationally recognized expert on Chinese foreign policy and U.S.-China relations. He has led major research programs at U.S. and other think tanks focusing on China and Asia, in addition to which he served as the director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). He has a long record of research on China: he has (co)authored over 100 China-related articles and published seven books that are directly related to China’s behavior in relation to international and regional security issues, such as *Rising Star: China’s New Security Diplomacy* (2007), *China: The Balance Sheet: What the World Needs to Know Now about the Emerging Superpower* (2006) and *Asia’s New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community* (2009). Due to this expertise, he is being regarded as one of the mostly-cited experts on Chinese foreign relations.

Q1: What are your thoughts about the ‘China’s Peaceful Development’ vs ‘China Threat’ debate, do you think it is still relevant and an actual discussion?

Q1: In China, it seems as if the debate has shifted. The term ‘peaceful development’ is still under use, even under Xi Jinping, but it has come with more caveats and qualifications. The most important is the fact that Beijing stresses that peaceful development, but.. we still must forcefully pursue our national interests. My thinking is that while in the past, peaceful development was all about ensuring a stable external environment because it needed that to attend to domestic challenges and foremost domestic growth, it seems as if China is increasingly more willing to take risks in that external environment nowadays. This might also be the result of the increase in difficulty of domestic challenges that China faces internally. This result in an approach that while still upholding ‘peaceful development’, now seems to involve more risk-taking in the external dimension.

Q2: Do you think this can also be translated to the case of Afghanistan, were there is a link between domestic stability in Xinjiang and Afghanistan?

Q2: Surely there is a link between the two, and the risk of extremist movements in this bordering country to Xinjiang is of importance to China. Especially when considering the evidence that their own jihadist movements have in the past been able to use Afghanistan as a safe-base, this is of concern. Then of course there is the relatively new problem of the ISIL and other groups that adds another dimension to this security dimension. While not the only factor for China’s involvement, it does indeed fit within this larger observation that domestic stability is of main importance.

Q3: What do you think about the New Asian Security Concept in general, when taking the views of it either being predominantly geopolitical tough-talk aimed at the U.S., or as an actual actionable security blueprint?

Q3: There is certainly a geostrategic element to the concept, but I would not necessarily frame it as being directly aimed at America. Instead, I think it is part of Xi Jinping’s larger vision on the centrality of China in Asia. In some sort of way, it is a part of the greater ‘rejuvenation’ of the nation that is aimed to restore the central role of China as a power, something which has
been more explicitly mentioned in recent years. In terms of the practicality of this vision, there is of course the One Belt, One Road initiative that is a large manifestation of this view.

Q4: What are your thoughts about Afghanistan’s role in that regard?

Q4: I have not heard a lot about the exact role of Afghanistan in the project, and I think there are a number of reasons this is the case. Besides the fact that Afghanistan is landlocked which does not benefit its practical relevance to OBOR, there is also not much to gain for China in terms of Afghanistan as an economic entity. Economic cooperation is not to yield much benefits for Beijing, and the instability in Afghanistan does surely not motivate China to look for ways to intensify this economic relationship. I think that in terms of OBOR, Afghanistan therefore has a low-priority.

Q5: But don’t you think that might also work the other way around? That China is concerned about the effects of instability of Afghanistan on the OBOR project?

Q5: Surely China does not want to see Afghanistan cause problems for the OBOR project, but this does probably not translate into Afghanistan taking a bigger place in the initiative. Nor do I think that this will lead Beijing to take on a ‘key role’ in Afghanistan, also because they will probably not want to see this backfire on the situation at home. Their approach is mostly when it comes to Afghanistan.

Q6: Okay, but considering the steps that China has taken in Afghanistan, are they not a sign that China is willing to engage itself deeper to the security situation in that country?

Q6: Yes, but I think these steps are mostly the result of low-risk policies, with possible high pay-off. The reconciliation talks are a prime example of this, because China had little to lose by bringing these parties to the table, but there was a potential for much benefits.

Q7: About these reconciliation talks, do you think the close cooperation with the U.S. in that regard is interesting when considering the increase in tensions in for example the South China Sea?

Q7: Well, I think this should not come as a surprise, since these are just two nations that are very capable of working together. In fact, this cooperation in Afghanistan illustrates this aspect of China-U.S. relations that so often gets overshadowed by the South China Sea conflicts. In my perspective, these events in the sea are not necessarily representative of the status of that relationship, but even coming closer to an exception to it. In that regard, I think it is important to highlight U.S.-China cooperation and this aspect of the case of Afghanistan might deserve more attention. In addition, I think Washington appreciates the increasing role of China, which it has been pushing for since over a decade. They like this development and would probably love to see more of it. It is of course questionable whether this will also happen.

Q8: Following up on that, in Western circles there have been disgruntled voices arguing that China has been sitting on the sidelines for all these years, and that they are only willing to get involved just because the Western troops are announcing their departure.

Q8: Who could blame them? I think China was indeed content with the western troops keeping Afghanistan relatively stable for all these years, and understandably so. An interesting line of thought would be what China would do if the troops would indeed withdraw in total. If that would be the case, I think China would primarily resolve to its pragmatic approach, for example by increasing its control on the border to prevent a spill-over
effect, rather than getting deeply involved in the country itself. I also think it is more likely for America to remain involved in Afghanistan.

Q9: Okay, what do you about the steps that China has taken then, also in terms of non-interference and the ‘keeping a low profile’ mantra?

Q9: There has already been a steady evolution with regards to the non-interference principle, maybe going back early as the early 2000s. I think China’s policy towards Afghanistan is another piece and example to that. I don’t see it as inconsistent per se, we have already seen more flexible interpretations of the non-interference principle.

Q10: Besides this move away from the non-interference principle, what do you think about the fact that it is quite a high-profile conflict?

Q10: That may allow for some argument that the Afghanistan case is indeed different, also because it is a bordering country. I think the Chinese have been quite sensitive to become overtly involved of ‘interventionist’ if you want to use that word, and especially in regards to its close neighbors. This might also be changing under Xi Jinping, where we previously some of the most interesting re-interpretations of the non-intervention principle tended to be far away from its borders, for example in Africa. So that’s an interesting new understanding of Beijing, more awareness of the problems that are right on their borders. Secondly, what might differentiate this case a little bit is that we are talking about a country that is in the middle of a conflict, a civil war. China’s willingness to get involved where there was conflict, tended to be through peace-keepers under UN-mandated missions, or to extract nationals. Afghanistan does have a UN-mandate for international involvement, so this does open doors.

Q11: What else can you tell me about China’s changing role in international relations, besides the move away from non-interference? I get the feeling that you are really stressing the importance of Xi Jinping’s presidency as ‘shaking up things’ in Chinese foreign policies?

Q11: I think there are two important factors in play. The first is simply China’s increased ability to project itself diplomatically, economically and military. China is simply a stronger more capable power. To me, the leaders in Beijing will be confident to reach for those tools to employ them in ways that they think best serves China’s interests. Part of the reason that China was less active in the past was because it could not. That has changed. Then you add on top of that Xi Jinping, who as a leader himself is very confident about his vision on China and how this needs to be accomplished. When he looks to the toolbox, he can see it is increasingly big. It’s hard to say which one of these two is the chicken or the egg, but it’s the confluence of both increased capacity on the one hand, and increased will in the form of Xi Jinping. They feed off of each other, and I think this explains a lot of the more activities recent behavior. I think it is especially the first part that so often get lost in analyses, if Xi Jinping was leader in the 1960’s he could not do this. Capacity plus will, or capabilities and intent if you will.

Q12: Talking about intent, do you think Xi Jinping’s vision is mostly about ‘restoring’ the centrality of China?

Q12: I think that indeed is very much what he has in mind. I think what he is doing is looking to China’s potential, which in his view has not been properly realized. I think he believes that this is the pathway to China’s success and to preservation of the party, as we mentioned earlier also by taking more risks. Time will tell whether he is right.