

CHINA, PAK. OUTLINE 'JOINT ACTION' TO ALIGN AFGHANISTAN STRATEGIES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Common ground: Shah Mahmood Qureshi with Wang Yi, right, in Beijing, in this file photo. AP/ANDREA VERDELLI

China and Pakistan on Saturday said they would more closely cooperate and work together in Afghanistan amid the changing situation in the country, as their Foreign Ministers proposed building the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into "a hub of regional connectivity".

Meeting in the Chinese city of Chengdu at the third strategic dialogue, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi outlined a five-point joint plan on working in Afghanistan, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Mr. Wang described the current situation as arriving "at an important juncture" as he criticised "the hasty U.S. withdrawal of troops" for having "neither fulfilled the purpose of fighting terrorism nor brought peace to Afghanistan but created a new security black hole," the statement said.

He said "both China and Pakistan are most directly affected by the situation in Afghanistan" as its neighbours and it was "necessary for both sides to strengthen cooperation to cope with the change", which he described as one of the focuses of the dialogue.

Mr. Wang outlined "joint actions" in five areas, starting with "the immediate priority of avoiding the expansion of war and preventing Afghanistan from falling into a full-scale civil war." The second focus would be to promote the intra-Afghan negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban and establish "a broad and inclusive political structure".

He said the third joint action would be "to resolutely combat terrorist forces". Mr. Wang only named the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which China has blamed for attacks in its western Xinjiang region, underlining China's concern that instability in Afghanistan could spill over into Xinjiang.

There do, however, appear to be stark differences in how both countries appear to view the terror issue and the role of other outfits in Afghanistan. Earlier this month, Mr. Wang said in a meeting with his Afghan counterpart Mohammed Haneef Atmar in Dushanbe that the "Taliban should stand clear of any and all terrorist forces." At the same summit on connectivity, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani publicly slammed Pakistan for failing to take actions to stop foreign terrorists from entering the country amid "an influx of over 10,000 jihadi fighters".

The fourth joint action would be to "promote cooperation among Afghanistan's neighbours" and "explore the construction of a platform for cooperation among them". Both would also more closely work on international fora on the Afghan issue, Mr. Wang said.

Terror attack in Pakistan

Both sides, in a "joint press release" issued after the talks that was put out by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "reaffirmed their commitment to facilitate and support 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' peace and reconciliation process" and "their support for the peaceful reconstruction of

Afghanistan”.

Both also “vehemently condemned” the recent terrorist attack in Pakistan in which nine Chinese engineers working on the Dasu hydropower plant were killed, along with four Pakistani nationals. Both sides “expressed their firm resolve to expose the culprits and their reprehensible designs through the ongoing joint investigation, give exemplary punishment to the perpetrators, ensure comprehensive safety and security of the Chinese projects, nationals and institutions, and prevent recurrence of such incidents”, the statement said.

The joint release also carried the now customary reference to Kashmir, saying the Pakistani side “briefed the Chinese side on the deteriorating situation in Jammu & Kashmir” while China “reiterated” its stand that it “opposes any unilateral actions that complicate the situation”, a position it has repeated in the wake of India’s 2019 reorganisation.

The Chinese side “reiterated its firm support to Pakistan in safeguarding its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence” and “striving for a better external security environment,” the joint release said, adding that both sides had agreed to push forward the CPEC “with the aim to continuously unleash the great potential of CPEC to make it a hub of regional connectivity.”

On CPEC

China’s Foreign Ministry said in May both countries had been in communication with Afghanistan over extending the corridor. “Afghanistan has imported and exported related goods through the Gwadar Port and Karachi Port. China, Pakistan and Afghanistan are discussing issues related to extending roads and expressways in Pakistan to Afghanistan,” spokesperson Zhao Lijian said, adding that “the CPEC is an economic initiative that is not aimed at third parties, and has nothing to do with territorial sovereignty disputes... and won’t affect our principled position on the Kashmir issue.”

India has opposed the CPEC, which passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, although China has pushed ahead with projects and stepped up its investments in PoK.

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