China’s strategic interests in Afghanistan are focused around domestic security, economic relations, and the determination not to cede regional influence to the United States (Hu, 2009:31). While structuring the Chinese government’s conceptualization of threats and opportunities in and around Afghanistan, these same issues contain inherent contradictions that problematize policy formation. Whereas economic cooperation entails greater interaction between Chinese and Afghan society, Chinese security concerns would be compromised if such interplay provoked extremism and radicalization of Xinjiang’s ethnic Uyghurs. If China takes a more militant approach in Afghanistan to address its security concerns, it risks alienating and antagonizing state and non-state regional actors, thereby compromising domestic security in a different perspective.

These conflicting priorities provide insight into the challenges Chinese policy makers face in formulating a comprehensive grand strategy in Afghanistan. Policy that fails to combine security, economic, and influence concerns will contain inherent weaknesses that could undermine all three. An effective strategy, therefore, must address these challenges with a comprehensive approach that maximizes political and economic benefits while minimizing loss.

It is clear that the Chinese government has developed short and long term policies designed to mitigate these concerns. What is less certain is whether these collective policies constitute a strategy or a series of unrelated initiatives. To determine the degree to which the policies are interrelated, it is necessary to examine linkages between them in terms of implementation and expected outcome.

To facilitate this analysis, the author will reference a theoretical grand strategy for China in Afghanistan put forward by Associate Professor Hu Jian of Yunnan Social Science University (Hu, 2009:31-33). In her work on Chinese security, Hu identifies a grand strategy that she believes would address all China’s Afghan strategic interests. While each policy objective within the grand strategy stands alone as a goal, the strength of Hu’s framework is that the policies are mutually constitutive.

Hu’s grand strategy calls on the Chinese government to: 1) participate actively in Afghanistan’s economic development; 2) increase...
cooperation with the Afghan government through non-traditional security activities; 3) use the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to address Sino-Afghan security concerns; 4) increase education and cultural exchanges with Afghanistan; 5) increase infrastructure construction and economic development on the Chinese-Afghan border; and 6) work with other neighbors to establish friendly relations that can be leveraged to solve Sino-Afghan issues (Hu, 2010:31-33).

The appropriateness of Hu’s grand strategy as a framework for analyzing China’s Afghan foreign policy becomes clear when compared with the country’s strategic concerns. The article’s first section is devoted to this comparison. Once established, the article’s second section uses Hu’s grand strategy as a framework to perform a systemic level foreign policy analysis. The expected outcome is a detailed outline of China’s existing policies and an understanding of whether these policies constitute a grand strategy.

China’s Strategic Concerns, Afghanistan

Security

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

The Chinese government is deeply concerned about the effects the current security situation in Afghanistan has on domestic stability in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Ethnic instability in the XUAR is unarguably one of the greatest threats to China’s domestic security and the source of one of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) most intractable policy dilemmas (Shirk, 2007:58). Threats of
domestic terrorism that surfaced in the XUAR in 2008 and the July 2009 ethnic riots in Urumqi increased the sense of insecurity in the region. This, in turn, forced a re-conceptualization of the government’s security strategy both regionally and in the XUAR (Weitz, 2010).

Despite the CCP’s ‘develop the west’ (xibu kaifa) program, the XUAR remains a region where economic underdevelopment, political marginalization, and perceived ethnic-based injustice remain salient challenges (Chung, Lai, and Joo, 2009:108). Together with mass Han migration to the XUAR and the resulting emergence of a two-tiered society in which ethnicity plays a role in economic and social opportunities, these variables contribute to social dissatisfaction that in recent years has resulted in violence (Brown, 2010). The death of more than 200 individuals during the 2009 Urumqi riots and the subsequent ethnic profiling for arrest and prosecution offer the most prominent example of the XUAR’s latent tensions and their potential to give rise to violent unrest.

While the majority of ethnic Uyghurs are content with Chinese nationality, a small group of Uyghur nationalists advocate violent separatism (Brown, 2010). Based in Xinjiang, the East Turkmenistan Liberation Organization (ETLO) is fighting for a Uyghur homeland occupying parts of Xinjiang. The Chinese government considers the ETLO a domestic terrorist organization with ties to foreign organizations, specifically Rebiya Kadeer’s World Uyghur Congress based in the United States.

The Chinese government is concerned that the ETLO will take advantage of the instability in Afghanistan to make contact with foreign religious and militant groups (Shambaugh, 2004:304). The CCP believes that such interaction could lead to further radicalization as well as an increase in tactical and organizational sophistication and ability to launch attacks in China. Chinese analysts estimate that ‘several hundred’ ETLO militants are actively training with the Taliban in Afghanistan while the group’s ‘core leadership’ train with Al Qaeda in Pakistan to launch a global jihad…

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to launch a global jihad (Hu, 2009:32). The February 2010 killing of
Uighur leader Abdul Haq al-Turkistani in Pakistan by an American
drone seems to support China’s concerns that Uyghur extremists are
establishing ties with other terrorist organizations (Clark, 2010).

US Military in Afghanistan

Chinese strategists and government officials have long ex-
pressed concern and frustration over perceived US attempts to arrest
China’s rise through a strategy of encirclement and containment (Feng,
Army (PLA) calls for a move away from a US-led unilateral military
environment in Asia towards a multilateral security mechanism of
‘strategic partnerships’ (Shambaugh, 2004:292).

The US military presence in Afghanistan is especially concern-
ing to the Chinese government and military as it represents an expan-
sion of US hard power from the Asia-Pacific into Central Asia (Small,
2010:88). Because the United States maintains large bases in South
Korea and Japan, the US military presence in Afghanistan does effect-
vively encircle China. Moreover, International Security Assistance
Force (ISAF) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) opera-
tions in Afghanistan employ some of the most advanced military hard-
ware in the world, effectively allowing China’s greatest international
rival to maintain a sophisticated, extensive military capacity essentially
along its western border (Hu, 2009:32-33).

Many Chinese analysts point to the ‘disproportionate’ amount
of force ISAF and NATO have deployed in Afghanistan as evidence
that US military goals extend beyond the stated mission of counterin-
surgency. Specifically, Chinese strategists question the need for such
pervasive air power in Afghanistan (Hu, 2009:32). At present, ISAF
and NATO air forces include the British GR-7, French F2, and US F-
16, F-15, and the B-1B bomber. Chinese military planners believe that
since the aircrafts play a nominal role in operations in Afghanistan they
are actually deployed to gain experience with regional long distance spy
and bomb raids that could be directed against China. Hu offers the F-
15 as a prime example that US assets in the region is really aimed
against China, noting that the plane has a capacity of more than 5000
kilometers—more than the longest distance from any two points in Af-
ghanistan (Hu, 2009:32-33).
Drug Trade

Traditionally, the majority of drug trafficking into China occurred between China’s Yunnan province and Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam (the ‘Golden Triangle’) (Townsend, 2005:3-4). A combination of successful anti-narcotic policies in the Golden Triangle and a growth in heroin production have shifted the center of gravity for drug trafficking toward Afghanistan, ‘the Golden Crescent’ (Xinhua News, 2009). Drugs from Afghanistan enter the country through Xinjiang, contributing to crime in the region and a spike in drug-related illnesses, such as HIV (Xinhua News, 2007). In 2008, police in Xinjiang reported 1,563 drug related cases involving over 2,000 suspects and seized over 144 kilograms of heroin, up 9.2 percent from the previous year (China Daily, 2009b).

According to the Afghan embassy in China, drug imports from the country to China account for an annual return of USD $250 million (Xinhua News Agency, 2010). This quantity equals the total legal trade between the two states and, if accurate, represents a significant security challenge.

Hu’s Grand Strategy: Security

Hu’s strategy both directly and indirectly addresses each security concern. In regard to the insecurity in the XUAR, Hu suggests policies aimed at cooperation with Afghanistan focused on non-traditional security activities like counter-terrorism and drug smuggling, as well as economic development along the XUAR-Afghan border. Together, these initiatives would target existing ETLO members in China and Afghanistan and address economic sources of instability.

Hu’s suggestion for greater cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on regional security, as well as the development of bilateral relations with neighboring states, would allow
China to mitigate its concerns regarding ISAF and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Through cooperation, the Chinese government can increase the number of actors involved in Central Asian affairs while extending China’s influence in the region. Cooperation with the Afghan government and the SCO on non-traditional security measures would also address the growing drug trafficking issue in Xinjiang. In this regard, Hu’s framework does seem to suggest the potential to address China’s security concerns through a unified and coherent strategy.

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Economic Relations

Natural Resources

The Chinese government views the country’s access to regional resources as integral to its national security and ability to continue a production-led growth strategy (Wesles, 2007:57). US control over sea lanes critical to the import of raw materials (on which Chinese domestic industry is increasingly dependent) has forced the Chinese government to focus on developing regional sources for inelastic goods such as oil, coal, and copper. China’s status as latecomer to the global energy market compels it to pursue undeveloped resource sources (Zhao, 2008:173).

For China, Afghanistan’s sizable mineral deposits are attractive due to their proximity and stage of development. Afghanistan’s mineral wealth includes iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium.

China Metallurgical Group (MCC), a Chinese state-owned company, is propelling Chinese investment in Afghanistan’s fledgling minerals sector. In 2007, the mining groups signed a USD $3.4 billion deal with the Afghan government to develop the Aynak copper field, making the Chinese government the largest foreign investor in the country (Weits, 2010). MCC plans on extracting more than 11 million tons of copper from the site over the next twenty-five years—the equivalent of one-third of all known copper deposits in China (Wines,
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2009). The Chinese government would also like to develop the Hajigak iron mine in Bamyan province. The mine is believed to have about 60 billion tons of ore (Liabeo, 2010).

The situation in Afghanistan directly affects China’s natural resource supply. Insecurity and resulting instability in Afghanistan has disrupted MCC’s development of the Aynak site and energy transport through and from Afghanistan. Additionally, China has a vested interest in its stability because Afghanistan’s geographic position makes it an ideal regional hub of trade between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The Chinese government has expressed interest in building a pipeline from Iran to Xinjiang, which would run through Afghanistan, as well as a rail line from the Aynak mine to China (Yue, 2009); (The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, 2008). Such projects are, of course, untenable if the current security situation is not remedied, but China’s commitment to these undertakings should be viewed as evidence of its overall energy interest in Afghanistan.

Trade

Between 2000 and 2009, official Sino-Afghan trade grew from USD $25 million to USD $250 million, making China one of Afghanistan’s largest trade partners (Xinhua News Agency, 2010). While this is an impressive gain over such a short period of time, trade between the two countries remains minimal and one-sided. The bulk of legal trade between the two states consists of Chinese electronics, which are affordable and available throughout Afghanistan (Xinhua News, 2010). Legal Afghan exports to China accounted for USD $2.325 million of total trade in 2009 (Afghan Customs Office, Ministry of Finance, 2010).

The Afghan government has expressed interest in broadening trade relations with China, particularly importing more high technology items (China Talk, 2009). Trade between the two states will undoubtedly grow with Chinese extraction of Afghan mineral, if Afghanistan is stabilized.
At present, trade without other states through Afghanistan is equally important to the Chinese government as trade with Afghanistan. The Chinese government has granted hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to Central Asian countries with the hope that these countries will increase the purchases of Chinese goods (Weits, 2010). Since Afghanistan is centrally located, the most direct trade route between China and a Central Asian, or South Asian, country is often through Afghan territory. The country’s current volatility, however, limits the transportation of goods within and across its borders (The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, 2009).

Hu’s Policy Recommendations: Economics

Hu’s grand strategy addresses Sino-Afghan economic relations in two parts. First, Hu stresses the need for the Chinese government to increase investment, trade, and business cooperation so as to improve political and social relations with Afghanistan. This type of economically driven strategy would contribute to a growth of Chinese soft power in Afghanistan, while demonstrating its commitment to the pursuit of ‘win-win’ policies.

Second, Hu sees Chinese economic activity as directly contributing to both Afghanistan’s and China’s security. Economic development in Afghanistan will provide employment alternatives for men involved in insurgency, while the Chinese government’s investment in economic growth in Xinjiang will contribute to China’s domestic stability by increasing the Uyghur’s quality of life. While Hu stops short of stating an economic policy towards Afghanistan would alone solve China’s security goals, she does stress the importance of economic development to regional stability.

China’s Regional Influence

Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has followed a periphery policy (zhoubian zhengce) aimed at fostering closer relations between China and its neighbors. While formulated in part to facilitate closer economic and security relations, the policy was also designed to mitigate regional fears about China’s ‘rise’ (Zhao, 2008:33). The Chinese government hoped this policy would lead to a twenty-first century ‘new Asianism’ in which it played a central role (Zhao, 2008:33).

China extended its periphery policy into Central Asia, most vigorously after the Soviet Union’s collapse. Whereas Central Asian countries were part of Moscow’s sphere of influence during the Cold War, after 1989, the Chinese government saw an opportunity to expand its influence in the region (Zhu, 2010:111). Through direct trade with
the newly independent Central Asian states, the Chinese government established relations it hoped would contribute to its ‘peaceful rise’ (heping jieqi).

Stability in Xinjiang, which shares a border with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, is central to China’s policy initiatives (Zhu, 2010:112). The fight against the so-called ‘three forces’ (sangu shili) of terrorism, extremism, and separatism led China to work with Russia to form the Shanghai Five in 1996, which evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. The SCO’s stated purpose is to strengthen good-neighborly relations among member states (which include China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan) and coordinate security, economic, and political actions between the SCO and other Central Asian states (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2010).

Starting in 2001, two sets of events radically altered China’s position in the region. The first was the ISAF/NATO-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which continues to undermine China’s position in Central Asia. Second were the ‘Colored Revolutions’ in the former Soviet States of Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan that threatened to destabilize Central Asia and break up the SCO (Rumer, Trenin, and Zhao, 2007:202).

ISAF/NATO’s presence in Afghanistan also affected the PRC’s relations with its long-standing ally, Pakistan. While China and Pakistan remain close, the United States’ presence in the region adds a third dimension to Sino-Pakistan relations that threatens to fundamentally alter the two countries’ bilateral relations (Hu, 2009:33). Tensions worsened between China and Pakistan following the Obama administration’s expansion of the US military role in Afghanistan to include more involved interaction with Pakistan (Department of State, 2009).

Hu’s Policy Recommendations: Regional Influence

Four of the six policy suggestions in Hu’s grand strategy address China’s need to enlarge its regional presence and influence. First, Hu suggests the Chinese government engage with the SCO to address regional economic and security matters. Used properly, China can leverage the SCO to serve as a balance to ISAF/NATO forces in Central Asia. Second, Hu stresses the need for bilateral cooperation between China and Afghanistan on non-traditional security including military, societal, economic, environmental, and political issues. Third, Hu encourages greater cultural and education exchanges between China and Afghanistan so as to increase mutual awareness between the two states’ respective populations. Interaction based on cultural and education re-
inforces China’s image as a responsible regional actor respectful of its neighbor’s sovereignty. Finally, Hu challenges the Chinese government to increase bilateral ties in the region, particularly with countries that could affect the military outcome in Afghanistan and that are hesitant to cooperate fully with the United States. These states include Pakistan, Iran, and India.

China’s Afghan Foreign Policy
Hu’s grand strategy for Afghanistan does contain a comprehensive enough approach to foreign policy to address the Chinese government’s strategic concerns. It is, therefore, an appropriate framework for measuring China’s current foreign policy’s strengths and weaknesses.

1. Become actively involved in Afghanistan’s economic development.

The benefits of greater Chinese economic activity in Afghanistan are clear. Through investment directed at infrastructure and mineral deposit development, the Chinese government is able to increase access to Afghan resources while expanding its political influence and ‘soft’ power in the region. The Chinese government can emphasize its focus on economic development efforts in Afghanistan to stress its policy of non-interference in domestic affairs, which sharply contrasts with NATO’s military activities (Agence France Presse, 2010). The Chinese government can also claim that it is contributing to Afghanistan’s security and stability by providing an economic alternative to insurgency. This position allows the Chinese government to skirt criticism that it is not contributing to Afghanistan security.

Towards this end, the Chinese government signed three economic agreements with the Afghan government in March 2010 (Rong and Sun, 2010). The agreements state that the Chinese government will provide Afghan workers with technical training, grant the state most favored trade status, and cultivate economic cooperation. In exchange for Chinese pledges of greater economic support, the Afghan government has agreed to guarantee security for Chinese workers in Afghanistan (China Talk, 2009).

In addition to promoting greater Sino-Afghan economic cooperation, the Chinese government has stated that it is committed to helping the Afghan government develop the country’s infrastructure. As part of MCC’s 2007 bid to develop the Aynak mine, the state-owned company pledged to build a copper smelter, a 400-megawatt coal power plant, and the first rail line within Afghanistan (Synovitz, 2008). MCC also promised to build roads, schools, hospitals, and mosques for the communities in proximity to the mine (Wines, 2009). The Chinese
government is also investing in Afghanistan’s telecommunication and power sectors (Small, 2010:82).

China has also contributed development aid to the Afghan government. In 2001, the Chinese gave USD $4 million in humanitarian aid and pledged USD $150 million more over five years (Kan, 2006:1). While this allocation is an insignificant portion of overall international aid so far committed to Afghanistan—which stood at USD $26 billion in 2008—the Chinese government has focused its support on high-profile public works such as an irrigation complex at Parwan and the Jomhuri hospital in Kabul (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008); (Xinhua, 2007).

While critics of China’s economic activity in Afghanistan point to China’s inability to deliver the promises for aid and/or development projects, the Chinese government has nevertheless been successful in leveraging its economic relations with Afghanistan to guarantee its role in the country (Xinhua Economic News Service, 2007).

2. Increase cooperation with the Afghan government on non-traditional security threats.

In theory, Chinese collaboration with Afghanistan on non-traditional security is focused around preventing what the Chinese go-

Map. The Chinese financed port of Gwadar is at the bottom left in Pakistan Baluchistan and the Aynak mine is just southwest of Kabul.
For China, the difficulty in implementing a foreign policy that incorporates bilateral security measures is that the country maintains a strict policy of not dispatching troops to foreign countries...”

Meetings between the Defense Minister Liang Guanglie of the PLA and his Afghan counterpart Abdul Rahim Wardak have yielded similar results. While in 2010, Defense Minister Liang pledged greater cooperation between the Chinese and Afghan military, such cooperation would be limited to China providing the Afghan with military supplies and training (ChannelNewsAsia, 2010).

For China, the difficulty in implementing a foreign policy that incorporates bilateral security measures is that the country maintains a strict policy of not dispatching troops to foreign countries. As recently as 2008, a spokesperson for China’s Foreign Affairs Ministry, Qin Gang, said that China would never send troops to Afghanistan (Jia, 2009).

3. Use the SCO to address Afghanistan’s security problems.

While unwilling to act bilaterally to address Afghanistan’s security, the Chinese government does support anti-terror and anti-crime activities for Central Asia under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Wong, 2009). For example, China participated in anti-terror drills in Russia and then committed one thousand troops for joint counter terror exercises in Kazakhstan in August and September 2010, respectively (Bosco, 2010).

Yet SCO material involvement in Afghanistan is extremely limited. While the organization has taken concrete steps to facilitate communication between its members and the Afghan government, in-
cluding the establishment of a SCO-Afghan contact group in 2006, it has not implemented a program to provide direct support (Official Website of the SCO Summit, 2006). Rather, the SCO has sought to control drug trafficking and terrorism in Afghanistan by establishing ‘anti-drug security belts’ around Afghanistan without enlisting cooperation of the Afghan military (Turner, 2005).

The lack of SCO-Afghan synergy does not stem from disinterest by the Afghan government. Since 2006, Afghan officials have attended the organization’s annual forums and in 2009 the Afghan and Pakistani governments made a direct appeal to the SCO for help on counter-terror and counter-narcotics training and support programs (UPI, 2009).

Rather, the SCO’s inability, or unwillingness, to engage directly with the Afghan government reflects internal sentiment. While in 2010, the SCO announced it would determine a strategy for cooperation with Afghanistan on anti-crime and anti-terror, this effort fizzled when member states could not agree on a comprehensive path forward (Guan, 2010). While Russia prefers the SCO take a more direct military approach, as long as it does not involve cooperation with NATO, Chinese officials prefer the organization to focus on economic issues (Bosco, 2010). Some analysts suggest this fundamental division could lead to a weakening of the SCO’s role not only in Afghanistan, but in the Central Asian region (Bosco, 2010).

4. Increase education and cultural exchanges with Afghanistan

The 2006 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighborly Relations between China and Afghanistan established a basis for exchange between the two states (People’s Daily, 2010). The document was ratified in 2008 and now structures cultural and educational transactions between the two states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2008).

In 2009, the Chinese government funded thirteen Afghan students to study for two years at Taiyuan University of Technology (TUT) in Shanxi province (Worrell, 2009). The students focused on Chinese language and culture to prepare them for future diplomatic and trade missions.

In 2010, the Chinese and Afghan governments met to celebrate the two countries’ fifty-fifth anniversary of diplomatic relations. To mark the occasion, both governments pledged to establish closer relations through exchanges aimed at increasing mutual understanding between their respective citizens (The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China Website, 2010). In March 2010, President
Hu Jintao specified that China would subsidize educational, cultural, and health exchanges, and would train an unspecified number of Afghan technical works (Xinhua, 2010).

5. Increase infrastructure construction and economic development on the China-Afghan border.

Hu stresses that the Chinese foreign policy initiative aimed at developing the Sino-Afghan border economically is principally driven by internal concern for domestic security in China and secondarily a means of stabilizing Afghanistan (Hu, 2010:33). This logic would support the Chinese position that the ideal way to undermine support for extremism in Xinjiang is to provide the region’s population with economic opportunity. The close linkage between domestic and foreign policy also evidences China’s belief that Uyghur separatists are involved in terrorist related activities and training in Afghanistan and present a direct threat to national security.

State directed economic development in the XUAR has a long history with mixed results. Far from contributing to regional stability, some analysts believe that regional economic development, which tends to favor Han Chinese, has actually exacerbated ethnic Uyghur disaffection (Clark, 2010).

Nevertheless, the Chinese government still identifies economic development as the principle component of its strategy to settle unrest in the XUAR (Zhang, 2010). Such efforts have intensified since 2009, when the widespread ethnic violence in the region left hundreds dead.

In 2010, the CCP dispatched more than 500 officials from 64 departments to conduct a thorough review of the economic and development situations in the XUAR’s cities, towns, and villages (China Daily, 2010). According to Ashat Kerimbay, chairman of the Xinjiang committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the CCP is preparing to launch an aggressive campaign to develop the region’s infrastructure and to encourage private investment.
in the region. The campaign’s stated aim is to improve the ethnic Uyghur’s livelihoods and to dampen separatist tendencies (China Daily, 2010).

6. Work with other neighbors to establish good relations.

The Chinese government has been very successful in establishing good relations in Central Asia through the SCO. While the SCO has not been willing or able to engage directly in Afghanistan, the organization has enabled China to establish bilateral and multilateral trade and security ties with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Chinese government also uses the SCO to engage with India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan—all of which have current observer status.

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Arguably, the most important regional states that could support China’s Afghan foreign policy are Iran, Pakistan, and Russia. The Chinese government has excellent bilateral ties with each of these states it could leverage to support Afghan security (The Press Trust of India, 2010). The difficulty with such bilateral or multilateral approaches is that these regional states all have strategic interests anathema to the US position in Afghanistan. While the United States military does seek to cooperate with each state individually, the emergence of a coalition of these states not under the auspices of the SCO could provoke a defensive response from ISAF/NATO forces.

The Chinese government has repeatedly called on the ‘international community’ to engage more actively in Afghanistan (Right Vision News, 2010). The CCP has even gone so far as to suggest it would be willing to contribute troops to a UN-led peace mission in Afghanistan (Jia, 2009).
Conclusion

By outlining China’s strategic concerns and then juxtaposing them with Hu’s foreign policy goals, it is possible to draw a framework for analysis of China’s Afghan foreign policy. This approach organizes China’s policy by potential outcome and contributes to an understanding of Chinese grand strategy (or lack thereof). It also allows the analyst to identify areas of policy strength and weakness.

The result is mixed. While it is not at all clear that the Chinese government has a grand strategy for its Afghan foreign policy, the state’s individual policies do address some fundamental concerns.

Of China’s strategic challenges, security occupies the central role. The main challenges in this regard are the Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang, the continued US military presence on China’s western border, and drug smuggling. Rather than implementing an assertive policy aimed at mitigating these threats, the Chinese government has opted for limited engagement. While this approach may serve a larger strategic concern, China’s unwillingness to engage more dynamically is detrimental to its shared security concerns with Afghanistan. Based on these observations, it is not possible to conclude that the Chinese government has a successful security strategy for Afghanistan.

Economic engagement drives the Chinese government’s strategy in Afghanistan, even in matters of security. Chinese investment in Afghan minerals sector is proof that the Chinese government is committed to remaining engaged with the country for the medium and long terms. Chinese efforts to develop Afghanistan’s infrastructure will boost China’s soft power as well as contribute to its ability to conduct business in Afghanistan in the future. The Chinese government’s economic policy towards Afghanistan is far sighted and well implemented.

Yet without a mechanism to secure its economic investments and interests, Chinese claims in Afghanistan are vulnerable. At present, ISAF and NATO trained Afghan police provide security for many of China’s projects, but this arrangement is only stable if the Chinese government remains on good terms with the United States.

One way for China to offset this security deficit is to seek partnerships with regional allies. Towards this end, the Chinese government has had a degree of success. Despite speculation that the SCO has lost direction due to Russia’s proclivity for military activities and China’s focus on economic relations, the organization remains an important regional tool for integration and cooperation. Under the SCO umbrella, China is able to participate in Central Asian politics both multilaterally and bilaterally.

China also enjoys friendly relations with Iran and Pakistan, giv-
ing it a distinctive regional advantage over the United States, which, while working closely with Pakistan, remains the regional ‘outsider’.

Nevertheless, China’s relations with the Central Asia states and Russia through the SCO, as well as its relations with Iran and Pakistan, do not directly help China achieve its security objectives in Afghanistan. At best these relations allow China to contain the Afghan ‘threat’ while forfeiting responsibility for in-country security measures to ISAF and NATO.

Following this logic, the Chinese government must take a more active role in providing Afghan security in order to achieve what Hu has presented as policy goals. ISAF leadership has repeatedly reached out to the Chinese government with offers for more direct military-to-military cooperation, but the CCP has resisted, maintaining that it cannot place its troops under foreign command. While hesitation of this kind is understandable, the Chinese government must find an acceptable alternative or risk the ability to ensure its own long-term interests in Afghanistan.

Jeff Reeves is the Director of the Culture and Conflict Studies Program at The Center for Advanced Defense Studies. His experience with non-traditional security and conflict include leading the development of a ‘civil unrest’ research team with Ver- atect Corporation, working with the United Nations on human development, researching nationalism in Asia with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and teaching courses on Asian security at Peking University.

In addition to his experience in security, Jeffrey has also worked extensive in development and education with the United Nations Development Program, the World Wildlife Fund, and United States Peace Corps.

Jeffrey received his PhD in international relations from the LSE in 2010. His doctoral research focused on Northeast Asia’s security environment and China’s role in the region. Jeffrey has a master’s degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Edin- burgh.
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