



China Building a Military Facility in the Wakhan Corridor: Fact or Fiction?

OE Watch Commentary: The *South China Morning Post* recently released the accompanying excerpted report, based on “sources close to the Chinese military,” claiming that China is assisting Afghanistan in setting up a mountain brigade in the Wakhan Corridor. According to the report, on 22 August the Afghan embassy in Beijing said China was assisting Afghanistan to set up the brigade to “boost counterterrorism efforts.” Now, however, both sides are denying the claim, saying that there will be “no Chinese military personnel of any kind on Afghan soil at any time,” and, as seen in the accompanying excerpted article, published in the Chinese state-sponsored *Global Times*, China “will not build a military base in Afghanistan.”

Despite these denials, with China having a history of downplaying plans and projects, the report is noteworthy. The Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of land, consisting of mountainous and rugged terrain that is difficult to access, in the far northeastern part of Afghanistan. The territory is of important historical and strategic significance. Following the Durand Line agreement of 1893, the Wakhan Corridor was formed to create a boundary, serving as a buffer, between the Russian Empire (Russian Turkestan) and the British Empire (British India). At the eastern most part of the corridor, Afghanistan shares a 47-mile-long border with China’s Xinjiang province. The excerpted article from *Inkstone* explains that Beijing views the Wakhan Corridor as a large geographical loophole for potential separatists and terrorists to try to come across its borders and into Xinjiang and militant Uyghurs have been blamed for violent attacks in Xinjiang.

As noted, Afghanistan is important to China’s own security. It could also be important to Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative. China has already opened up its first overseas military base in Djibouti and there is talk of it opening another base in Gwadar, Pakistan. As the country moves forward with its Belt and Road Initiative, it has become aggressive in its plans to provide security for the project, which is expected to cost upward of \$8 trillion. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The war-torn Central Asian country (Afghanistan) has become increasingly important for China’s own security, as well as President Xi Jinping’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative...’”

Source: Minnie Chan, “China is Helping Afghanistan Set Up Mountain Brigade to Fight Terrorism,” *South China Morning Post*, 28 August 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2161745/china-building-training-camp-afghanistan-fight>

Sources close to the Chinese military earlier told the Post that China had funded and started building a training camp for Afghan troops in Afghanistan’s isolated Wakhan Corridor – a narrow strip of inhospitable and barely accessible land extending about 350km from the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan to China’s Muslim region of Xinjiang.

One of the sources said that once the camp was completed, the People’s Liberation Army was likely to send troops there, but the embassy denied the claim, saying no Chinese military personnel would be stationed in Afghanistan.

The war-torn Central Asian country has become increasingly important for China’s own security, as well as President Xi Jinping’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, a huge trade and infrastructure plan.

“Construction of the base has started, and China will send at least one battalion of troops, along with weapons and equipment, to be stationed there and provide training to their Afghan counterparts,” one of the sources said.

Source: China Not Building Military Base in Afghanistan: Defense, Foreign Ministries,” *Global Times*, 30 August 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1117727.shtml>

The report was “inconsistent with facts,” defense ministry spokesman Wu Qian said at a briefing on Thursday.

The report was also denied by foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying at a daily briefing on Wednesday, without elaboration.

China will likely provide counter-terrorism training to Afghan counter-terrorism forces and police, but only within the Chinese border, Li Wei, a counter-terrorism expert at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, told the Global Times on Thursday.

“China will not build a military base in Afghanistan,” he said.

Source: Kinling Lo, “Why is China Funding a Military Outpost in Afghanistan?,” *Inkstone*, 29 August 2018. <https://www.msn.com/en-sg/news/other/why-is-china-funding-a-military-outpost-in-afghanistan/ar-BBMDly5>

Who exactly will be in this camp?

Minnie (Chan): *An Afghan diplomatic official in Beijing has denied the involvement of any Chinese military personnel in this project. But according to my sources, China will need to send more than 500 personnel to the camp.*

Not everyone there will be training troops or will be combat-ready soldiers. Within the group, there will be people who are engineers doing construction work for the camp.

Why is Afghanistan going along with this?

Minnie: *Afghanistan is poor. All of their weapons were purchased from overseas, and they do not have a domestic weapons construction industry. They need weapons, and they need people to train them. China is fully funding the project, so for Afghanistan, it is like military aid.*