



Is China's Afghanistan Strategy Modeled on Russia in Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: On 22 January, the excerpted Chinese-language article on *sina.com* discussed Russian analyses of recent reports that China is constructing a military base in northeastern Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, which borders China. The purpose of the base is reportedly to prevent terrorists in Afghanistan from infiltrating China through the mountainous border between the two countries.

According to the article, Russian military experts see the construction of the base as representative of China's increasing activity in regional affairs. According to a quoted expert, China's operations in Afghanistan also follow the example of Russia's operations in Syria. This means China will rely "on cooperation with the national government and maintain friendly relations with the locals" in order to achieve its objectives. The article, however, notes that Russian experts see the situation in Afghanistan as different than Syria because the civil wars in Afghanistan have been ongoing for several decades whereas the war in Syria only began in 2011. Nevertheless, Russian experts state that China can still learn from Russia's experience in Syria supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The article also states that China has not officially recognized that it is constructing a base in Badakhshan. China has only said it is engaging in counter-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan out of mutual respect. A Russian analyst, according to the article, nevertheless interprets this as a clear sign that China will maintain a presence in Afghanistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “俄媒分析中国帮阿富汗在两国边境建基地用于反恐 (Russian media analysis of China's help to Afghanistan border construction sites for anti-terrorism),” *sina.com*, 22 January 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2018-01-22/doc-ifyquixe5821219.shtml>

Russian media analysis says that China is building a military base in the Badakhshan province of northeastern Afghanistan bordering China, due to fears that terrorists will infiltrate the country through the borders with China. Reportedly, a special committee of military experts from China and Afghanistan came to Badakhshan province to locate the site and assess the workload. A military expert at the Russian Higher Institute of Economics, said, “building a new military base for the Afghan army is an aspect of China's active participation in regional affairs. If this trend continues, then China's future is likely to follow Russia's military presence in Syria: relying on cooperation with the national government and maintain friendly relations with the locals.”

Russia dispatched troops in Syria to intervene in the local situation when the civil war had transpired for only a few years. The move was mainly aimed at helping the Bashar al-Assad regime, which has friendly relations with Russia. The conflict in Afghanistan has been decades. If China wants to help the situation in the region, it may learn from Russia's experience in Syria.

As for whether China will help Afghanistan build a base, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said at a press conference recently that it did not know what the media has been saying but that China always supports carrying out international anti-terrorism cooperation on the basis of mutual respect.

“Building a new military base for the Afghan army is an aspect of China's active participation in regional affairs.”



Fayzabad in Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan.

Source: Julian G. Albert, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fayzabad_in_Badakhshan_Province_of_Afghanistan.jpg, (CC-by-2.0).