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## China's Engagement with the Taliban Government: Realpolitik or Geo-economics?

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### **Abstract**

China-Afghanistan relations is a strategic shift driven by Realpolitik and Geo-economics. This paper explores Chinese policy objectives in Afghanistan, focusing on security concerns and economic opportunities. China is driven by stabilizing its western border, stopping extremism, and leveraging Afghanistan's geopolitical position in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) context. The Taliban's lack of governmental experience, their diplomatic isolation, and their inability to maintain stability challenge China's investments. However, China employs diplomatic realism, economic incentives, and regional alliances, particularly with Pakistan, to overcome these complexities. China's approach, in the context of geopolitical competition against the West and regional actors such as India and Russia, employs security-oriented diplomacy and economic outreach. China's balance between stability and economic interests is analyzed in this paper, and insights into greater power shifts in the region are offered.

Keywords: China-Afghanistan relations, Realpolitik, Geo-economics, Belt and Road Initiative, Taliban, regional security, economic incentives, geopolitical competition



## Introduction

China's relationship with the Taliban government is a strategic shift in China's history of its interaction with Afghanistan which also reflects the transformation of China's role in the global system. Being located at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East, Afghanistan has inherent geostrategic importance that attracted regional and global powers' attention for centuries. It boasts features such as a harsh terrain and abundant natural resource, positioning it as a strategic center for trade, cultural exchanges and geopolitical rivalries. Afghanistan is known as the graveyard of empires because it is difficult to rule, but its value as a strategic asset has not diminished. Since the withdrawal of the USA and the new ruling of the Taliban in August 2021, Beijing has become one of the most influential stakeholders of Afghanistan's future.

China's interest in Afghanistan is shaped by two primary imperatives: security and economic benefits (Zhang, 2022). Security concerns are due to proximity of Afghanistan to China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, a hotbed of unrest and separatist activity. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is among the influential transnational militant groups that pose a real threat to China. Those concerns have been ramped up by the Wakhan Corridor, connecting both countries, and recognized as a possible pathway for extremism movements (Khan et al., 2023). Thus, Beijing's interaction with the Taliban is based on a realistic necessity of stabilizing the western border area and preventing the transition of Afghanistan into a hotbed of extremism capable of threatening China.

From the economic point of view, Afghanistan aligns with China in its vision of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure and development project aimed at enhancing connectivity and fostering economic growth (Tian et al., 2024). Afghanistan's strategic location positions it as both a continuation of the CPEC and a gateway to the Central Asian states. Also, the country is endowed with untapped mineral resources such as lithium, copper, and other rare earth materials that are essential to the innovation, high-tech, and renewables industries. Thus, incorporating Afghanistan into economic projects, China gets the opportunity to control valuable resources, deploy new supply routes, and expand its sphere of influence (Soherwordi and Sulaiman, 2021).

According to Niu and Huang (2022), China has pursued a different strategy in Afghanistan compared to its western counterparts. The United States and its allies based their strategies on military interventions, whereas China took a path of non-intervention and pragmatic diplomacy. This policy is based on economic cooperation, political engagement, and mutual respect. However, with the resurgence of the Taliban, regional dynamics have changed, and Beijing needs to reorient its policy mainly due to weak governance and lack of international legitimacy (Lemon et al., 2024). Apart from this, internal division also forms one of the greatest challenges. ISS-K and other militants are also putting Chinese investments under threat (Khan et al., 2023).

An interplay of realpolitik and geo-economics lies at the core of China's Afghanistan policy. From the realpolitik point of view, Beijing's principal objective in Afghanistan is the stabilization of its western border and a prevention of the country being a source of destabilization in the neighborhood (Khan and Khan, 2021). That has meant cautious but purposeful engagement with the Taliban. In exchange for commitments from them to suppress terrorist



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

actions, China offers economic incentives and diplomatic legitimacy. On the economic side, the long-term view of Afghanistan joining the BRI would improve regional connectivity and secure access to very important resources. . However, these efforts face challenges: (a) the ability of the Taliban to rule, (b) competition between regional actors, and (c) doubt among Western countries over the Chinese interest (Sarbiland and Stanikzai, 2024).

China's involvement with Afghanistan is, in fact a part of a long term strategy that has been characteristic of China's foreign policy in the recent decades – the desire to become a world power that can assume mediation and negotiation roles in world conflicts, as well as contribute to infrastructural development of troubled regions and their integration into global markets (Bukhari et al., 2024). By navigating the complexities of Afghanistan's political landscape, China aims at expanding its soft power, exporting its development model and counterbalance the western influence in the region. This article explores the historical, political, and economic dimensions of China's engagement with the Taliban government, examining whether its actions in Afghanistan are driven by realpolitik or geo-economics. It also explains as to how Beijing balances its security concerns with its economic objectives.

### **Historical Background**

Sino-Afghan relations have their roots in the ancient Silk Road era, when the Chinese dynasties used Afghanistan as a conduit to reach South Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Persian Empire (Khan and Ayaz, 2017). During this time, Afghanistan was the epicenter of not just the trade of products and ideas but also of many cultural practices. The Buddhas of Bاميان and other trade artefacts show how closely the two cultures were linked and provide insight into the nature of their interactions. Both the economic growth and the cultural endowment of those two regions were positively affected by these contacts. However, during the colonial period the relations between China and Afghanistan ebbed down owing to the emergent European imperialism and growing competition known as the Great Game between Britain and Russia. The change of the balance of power excluded Afghanistan from focus in China's foreign policy, with limited direct engagement during this period (Toubekis et al., 2017; Yousuf, 2022).

A new era in China-Afghanistan ties began in the twentieth century. Afghanistan formally recognized China in 1950, and in 1955, the two countries established diplomatic relations (Yousuf, 2022). This marked the beginning of a relationship based on mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference. However, these dynamics were changed with the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This Invasion was being seen in China as Soviet expansionism. As a result Beijing aligned with the west to counter USSR Through its ally Pakistan China provided support to the Afghan resistance groups (Wei, 2018). It was because of this pragmatic approach, China was able to monitor the developments without becoming directly involved in the conflict (Atif, 2024).

After the Soviet troops left in 1989, Afghanistan fell into civil war which enabled the Taliban to seize control in the early 1990s. During this time China chose to avoid official Taliban ties while using Pakistan as a pathway to maintain ongoing diplomatic dialogue. China pursued sensible decisions rather than matching beliefs which helped protect what it wanted from Afghanistan while staying uninvolved in local power struggles (Ibrahimi, 2017).



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

The relations between China and Afghanistan evolved during post-9/11 times presenting both new threats and new opportunities. The United States led invasion helped create President Karzai's democratic government which opened doors for China to invest in Afghanistan's economy and build infrastructure (Sarbiland and Stanikzai, 2024). The most notable Chinese investment was formalized in 2007, when the China Metallurgical Corporation (MCC) entered into a \$3.5 billion agreement to develop the Aynak copper deposit. Afghanistan also sought closer ties with China. For example, In January 2002, newly-appointed Interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai visited Beijing and met with President Jiang Zemin, prior to China's reopening of its Kabul embassy the subsequent month. President Jiang promised an immediate \$1 million in grants and nearly \$3 million in emergency supplies to Afghanistan, with a total of \$150 million in help to be allocated over time (Ku et al., 2018).

This withdrawal of the US and NATO forces in 2021 forms a new epoch; making a way for China to reconsider its Afghanistan strategy again. Taliban's resurgence posed threats and opportunities, requiring new directions that would serve Beijing's both security and economic imperatives (Samad, 2025). Understanding this history is essential for considering China's current approach to the Taliban and its effects for the regions and the world.

### **Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative method to look into China's interactions with the Taliban's regime, with special reference to Realpolitik and Geo-economics. Employing secondary data analysis constitutes the primary approach to this study; it incorporates journal articles, policy documents and reports, government statements and press releases. Through the analysis of these sources, the research examines the patterns and themes that explain china's strategic interests, including the stabilization of security threats on China's western frontier and the achievement of economic goals through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This would provide researchers with insight into why China does what it does in the unique political condition in Afghanistan.

A thematic approach has been undertaken while trying to explain data as it applies to three prominent themes: the defense of security in Xinjiang at the same time as making infrastructure investments and infrastructure projects for Afghan and exerting efforts towards Western diminution of influence. A primary source consideration between 2016 and 2024 provides relevant and realistic change in dynamics over Sino-Afghan relationship. Special emphasis was placed on triangulating data from scholarly and policy-oriented literature to reduce biases and improve the trustworthiness of conclusions. The study recognizes the inherent limits of depending exclusively on secondary data and solves this issue by integrating multiple views and closely examining differences across sources. This research offers a comprehensive framework for examining how China reconciles its pragmatic security interests with its long-term economic objectives in its engagement with the Taliban administration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

From the perspectives of realism and economic liberalism, China's involvement with the Taliban can be examined, providing insights into the realpolitik and geo-economics of Chinese policy in Afghanistan. These theories offer different as well as complementary lenses through which we can understand how security



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

concerns, economic opportunities, and pragmatic diplomacy have all contributed to Beijing's strategic calculus (Tauseef and Legacy, 2024).

Realism, also referred to as *realpolitik*, emphasizes self-interest, power, and survival within the inherent self-help system (Rosenberg, 2024). This framework pinpoints the major security factor that made China engage the Taliban through recognition, mainly because of the security threats on China's western border. Afghanistan and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region have a close proximity; Beijing views groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as potential threats, and they can use Afghanistan as a base. Actually, the diplomatic interaction of China with the Taliban, working as an external factor, is a way to stop anti-China activities in Afghanistan. The Wakhan Corridor, which connects Afghanistan to China, is of even greater interest. Given the threats of cross-border militancy that directly implicate Beijing, there is always a strong interest in Afghanistan's affairs (Biswas, 2021).

According to Biswas (2021), realism also considers China's rival, the United States, and its desire to challenge China. The power vacuum that was created following the withdrawal of the U. S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021 gave China a perfect opportunity to increase its power with no one to challenge it. The Chinese engagement with the Taliban is therefore not only a strategy to consolidate Beijing's position and safeguard its interests in Central Asia but also a way of challenging the Western discourse on governance and security. This is the realist reasoning in line with China's strategic objective to challenge the US and become the leading power in the region and globally.

Through economic liberal beliefs of international cooperation China seeks to exploit its geo-economic trade potential in Afghanistan. Under the liberal theory, the Belt and Road Initiative acts as China's main tool in designing its approach to Afghanistan and its development of regional trading networks. Being the gateway between South and Central Asia and the Middle East makes Afghanistan crucial for China's project of linking countries through infrastructure. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor serves as an example to start building infrastructure projects in Afghanistan while creating new trade networks (Tian et al., 2024).

Economic liberalism explain China's pursuit of natural resources. The vast lithium copper and rare earth element deposits of Afghanistan help China run its high-tech industry and supply renewable energy sources. As China works to build relationships with the Taliban it wants to both gain control of Afghanistan's resources and help develop the country into a safer place (Samad, 2024). Under the liberal theory, economic partnerships between nations lower conflicts and promote regional unity that matches China's policy to avoid political interventions while supporting development projects (Dunne, 2024).

The combined analysis of realism and economic liberalism reveals China's full approach to Afghanistan policy. Realism helps see how China uses security-based diplomacy in national interests while economic liberalism shows why economic opportunities drive China's engagement. The research explains how China combines security needs with economic interests to guide its policy in Afghanistan. Beijing combines principles of realism and liberalism to develop its Afghanistan strategy against the regional uncertain conditions.

### **China's Realpolitik Approach**

China has applied a realistic policy towards the Taliban regime prioritizing security concerns regarding national security and regional stability. *Realpolitik*



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

approach is originated from realist school of international relations where validity of state action as based more on power and self-interest rather than with ideology or norms (Westcott, 2022). This context explains China's calculated, pragmatic approach towards Afghanistan under the Taliban: it's mainly aimed at protecting its borders, neutralizing threats and having a stake in the politically sensitive area. Security concerns are at the center of Chinese realpolitik approach.

Beijing places strategic importance on Afghanistan due to its proximity to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. There are underlying seeds of violence in Xinjiang and Beijing has made it clear that groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) take advantage of the instability in the region to pursue separatist aspirations. Withdrawal of the US forces and ascendance of the Taliban in Afghanistan presents both challenges and opportunities to China. In one sense, it is indicative of Afghanistan as a center of terrorism; in another sense, China can see it as a chance of signing security assurances with the Taliban (Popescu, 2021). In other words, besides using diplomacy, China has been trying to coax the Taliban into cutting its ties with ETIM and other transnational militants.

The Wakhan Corridor which is a transitional Afghan territory links the two countries is a major geographic factor that is considered by China in its security strategies. This corridor has been identified as having strategic implication for militants' transport being a potential transit path, which enhances China's alertness and involvement (Amir, 2023). To overcome such risks, China is now building a cooperative relationship with the Taliban in the hope of ensuring its western border from cross-border terrorism. Another aspect of China's realpolitik is its desire to challenge other powers in the region. The withdrawal of the United States and NATO allies from Afghanistan in 2021 left a political and security void that China appreciates. As it has been mentioned before, there was no direct competition from the western countries anymore; therefore, China had tried to offer Afghanistan as a stabilizing factor and a valuable ally. These assertive action correspond with China's wider political agenda of countering the USA and exercising influence in different parts of the global South (Manish and Kaushik, 2023).

This realpolitik standpoint of China is magnified when one analyses Beijing's alignment with regional actors such Pakistan. Pakistan which has been supporting Taliban is the intermediary through which China handles Afghanistan. This trilateral relation gives chances to Beijing to control Pakistan's authority over the Taliban to secure its self-interest. Also, it coincides with the strategy of China to weaken influence of India in South Asian region, as Afghanistan have always been a theatre of India-Pakistan confrontation (Yaqin and Begam, 2024).

Despite the fact that, China's Realpolitik diplomacy observed more of security, it also has a measure of economic benefits as well. Beijing's promises of investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure and resource extraction serve dual purposes: buying cooperation from the side of the Taliban and advancing the strategic position of China in Central Asia. These economic gestures are anything but humanitarian; they are economic politics meant to strengthen the position of China while preserving the matters of its security.



## **Geo-economic Interests**

The Chinese interaction with the Taliban are not merely in the realm of security but are as much to do with geo-economics. These interests are in congruence with the Chinese broader strategy of increasing its influence through economic incentives, infrastructure development resource extraction. As a country with largely unexplored mineral resources, coupled with a geographical position nestled in the heart of Central Asia, Afghanistan offers Beijing unique potential to expand its opportunities especially within the disguise of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Ali, 2022).

According to Yar et al. (2024), mineral resources are one of the main geo-economic assets of Afghanistan that can attract China's interest. It possesses huge resources of rare earths, lithium, copper and other strategic metals needed in the production of sophisticated technology products and clean energy. Lithium, or "white gold," is especially important for the manufacture of batteries for electric cars and other renewable energy storage devices which form the core of China's bid for tech supremacy. To that end, through direct investments, including acquisition of concessionary rights in the mining sector in Afghanistan, China wants to ensure it has a share in these strategic materials, which will enable it to cement its strategic position in the global value chains. This approach dovetails with Beijing's steady economic plan of decreasing the reliance on outside markets and increasing its capability in strategic sector technologies.

Besides, mineral wealth, Afghanistan shares a strategic position in Asia for China in the process of realizing its connectivity projects. Located at the meeting point of South Asian, Central Asian and the Middle Eastern markets, Afghanistan offers the potential as a transit market for trade correlations between these regions. To add Afghanistan to the BRI, it forms a perfect opportunity to encourage the construction of physical connections like railways, highways, and energy pipelines that will connect China with Central Asia and beyond. Government of Pakistan, aided by China, could bring the BRI project of CPEC to Afghanistan along with progression in promoting the trade and investment of the south Asian region (Ghosh, 2023).

Furthermore, the economic integration of Afghanistan furthers China's larger geopolitical agendas. In attempting to build an infrastructure stake in Afghanistan, Beijing tries to assume the position of a prime economic partner at the expense of rival Western powers and other regional players such as India. With this, the BRI integration would also reinforce China's economic presence with its Central Asian neighbors and further establish its dominance over what is essentially its historical back door, one traditionally viewed as the arena for the great game of power competition (Ghosh, 2023). Moreover, the geo-economic interests of China in Afghanistan are intertwined with its domestic economic agenda. Investment in the reconstruction of Afghanistan offers very profitable opportunities to Chinese companies, especially in construction, engineering, and energy sectors. These projects bring not only profits but also help to deal with overcapacity in China's domestic industries, a chronic challenge for its economy. Nevertheless, a number of factors limit Beijing's geo-economic opportunity in Afghanistan, despite its many potential prospects. The situation remains highly volatile, and the inefficiencies of the current Taliban government pose a significant risk to the safety of Chinese investments. Some of the broader threats that can negatively impact the infrastructure projects and Chinese people are the



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

security threats from militants like ISISK. Moreover, the institutional environment is underdeveloped in Afghanistan and there are local factions that could hinder large-scale economic projects. At the same time, however, it forms a part of China's geo-economic dreams of building a New Silk Road spanning Central Asia, and Afghanistan stands at the pivot. Using economic inducements and development grants, Beijing aims to include Afghanistan with its dream of the Belt and Road Initiative project (Qu and Peng, 2024). Besides strengthening China's position in the region, this approach correlates with the general Chinese concepts of maintaining such economic integration as the key element of stability and cooperation.

### **Challenges and Risks**

Analyzing China's policies toward Afghanistan, it is possible to conclude that there are multitudes of advantages and opportunities, as well as serious difficulties and threats resulting from China's cooperation with Afghanistan. Some of them entail the security situation in Afghanistan, the limited institutional environment there, the Taliban's lack of recognition by the world community, and regional conflict lines. Under these circumstances, China is forced to think twice and take gradual steps to achieve its economic goals gradually all the while considering the risks involved in operating in such an environment.

### **Security Concerns**

The most apparent problem for China is the instability of the security situation in Afghanistan. Despite the promises made by the Taliban regarding security and giving no space to non-state actors, ISIS-K and other groups put the security of region at risk. ISIS-K has been successful in carrying out attacks, which negatively impacted the Taliban's assertion of dominance. However, for China, the threat is rather high because Afghanistan shares borders with the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Militant organization such as the ETIM could use Afghanistan for launching attacks and, thereby, pose a threat to China's western frontier (Khan et al., 2023).

### **Weak Governance and Institutional Fragility**

The second a major risk stems from Afghanistan's poor governance structures and institutions especially under the newly formed Taliban rule. Lack of a proper administration team, and internal divided loyalties also prove to be a problem since it is an Iranian group that has little experience in governance. This dysfunction covers elements so crucial for China's economic cooperation such as contract rights protection, rule of law and public order, as well as the public services required for the investment (Sultani, 2024). Other issues include lack of favorable legal systems and sound procedures for solving conflicts which makes problems for Chinese firms who intend to invest in Afghanistan.

### **International Legitimacy and Sanctions**

Issues of political non-recognition of the Taliban regime, as well as sanctions by the Western countries are the significant challenges for Afghanistan. The country is still devoid of many diplomats and for a long time, its economy is recorded to be very weak, relying mainly on international donations. This brings about a form of alienation that reduces interactive communication between the Taliban



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

and international financial bodies as well as encourages little foreign direct investment to the country. Thus, for China, involvement in Afghanistan under such circumstances poses threats to the country's diplomatic image and likely to attract the backlash from Western countries (Sultani, 2024). However, sustaining an economic relationship with the Taliban but not being in a position to sanction them brings diplomatic sensitivity balancing to progressive Chinese recognition globally.

### **Economic and Logistical Risks**

On the economic side, however, Afghanistan has great potential but is problematic for logistic reasons. This is due to the physical geographical characteristics of such as; tough terrains, poorly developed transport network, and a land locked country makes trade and transport difficult and costly. These issues are further worsened by continuing volatility, which raises the challenges of very large capital projects associated with China's Belt & Road (Madni and Bakht, 2024). These conditions expose the Chinese firms to risks such as delays, cost overflows, and disruption that make its returns a financially volatile business.

### **Regional and Global Implications**

China's involvement with Afghanistan's Taliban government creates strategic impacts extending further than the areas of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The Taliban's capture of Kabul alongside the US-backed Government defeat in 2021 opened a space that the Chinese Communist Party rapidly filled based on security together with economic motivations. Other regional powers face significant consequences as Beijing changes its geopolitical approach which adjusts global strategic architecture alongside regional priorities and connection establishment.

After the US withdrawal China has pursued ambiguous relations with Taliban-led Afghanistan through regional alliances with the SCO together with major power cooperation within BRICS that demonstrate various levels of interactions between local interests and global influences. China stands to benefit from recommended frameworks in both the regional and world contexts but its relations with Afghanistan are impeded by the Taliban's present lack of international legitimacy. The limited international status of Afghanistan weakens China's Afghan strategy while obstructing the general process of regional integration across the area. The extensive geopolitical networks of South Asia and Central Asia become even more complicated through the elaborate strategic positions held by Pakistan, Iran, India, and Russia.

The different states that build this super-Eurasian region operate with conflicting priorities but also share common spheres of interest. The help Pakistan provides China in its Afghan strategy stands against India's cautious perspective of the China-Pakistan-Afghanistan network. India had lost a total of \$ 3 Billion during the period in which India invested in Afghan infrastructure under US-led Government in Kabul (Yousuf and Mir, 2024). Iran hosts the second-largest Afghan refugee since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan followed by the post-9/11 American War on Terror. Tehran limits its diplomatic outreach because it needs reassurance about border protection and Afghan refugee management along with Helmand River hydrological rights. Due to terrorism risks originating in Central Asia and its need to balance Western supremacy across Eurasia Russia maintains



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

its regional position. Various factors produced a complex geopolitical situation that threatened China's ability to advance in Afghanistan.

Despite these challenges, Beijing has aggressively filled the vacuum created by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan by engaging the Taliban regime economically. One of the biggest challenges for China is the exclusion of the Taliban government from major regional platforms, such as the SCO. Most recently the 23rd SCO Council of Heads of Government meeting in Islamabad in October 2024 had a significant absence of the Taliban leadership given its international standing (SATP, 2024). This turn-off hampers attempts to insert Afghanistan into regional economic and security frameworks, reducing Afghanistan's role as a trusted partner.

China wished to integrate Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the expansion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in particular. Pakistan, a long-time Taliban friend and a major partner in China's regional strategy, of course, is essential as a facilitator. But, since the Taliban regained power in 2021, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have increased, especially over the contested Durand Line. Pakistan's border fencing, which was done by Pakistan during the U.S.-backed Afghan government in Kabul to check militancy, has been damaged by the Taliban, who refuse to accept the legitimacy of the boundary (Ali, 2025). Fighting at major border crossings such as Torkham and Spin Boldak has blocked trade and movement. Pakistan accuses the Taliban of harboring TTP militants, who are fighting for the Taliban-like government in Islamabad, deepening mistrust and threatening regional stability (Ali et al., 2025).

India's security concerns from Afghanistan's closeness towards India's traditional rivals China and Pakistan forced it to reevaluate its regional strategies. After the Taliban takeover, New Delhi continued to look for ways to maintain an influence presence in Afghanistan – expecting the Taliban to form an inclusive government and already invested billions in Afghan development projects and humanitarian assistance. In Afghanistan, India has stayed closer to the United States and other partners that seek to offset China's increasing influence there. These initiatives highlight India's two-pronged approach of engagement and containment in a region that is of vital security and economic interest to it (Ali, 2025).

Afghanistan's geographical politics are complicated by the presence of Russia, a great Eurasian power. Moscow's stakes in Afghanistan are to contain terrorism in the region and the spillover of terrorism and drug trafficking into Central Asia, a space that Moscow perceives as falling within its sphere of influence. Within the SCO framework, Russia collaborates with China on shared security interests, but Moscow is cautious of growing economic influence in Central Asia. Russia, in turn, has been moving to assert its power in Afghanistan mainly as part of its agenda to challenge Western hegemony, restore a multipolar world order, and establish itself as a key player in the Eurasian geopolitical space (Saxena, 2025).

The lack of international acknowledgment of the Taliban's rule has placed China in a difficult position. When the Taliban have sought to deepen Afghanistan's economic and security ties with Beijing. The geopolitically competitive environment lacks BRI's and CPEC's full integration in regional frameworks for Beijing because the Taliban cannot be recognized diplomatically and its ambition cannot be aligned with Islamic State or India. Beijing's concern about the human rights record of the Taliban as well as concerns about Afghanistan's internal



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

unity further complicate China's engagement with the new Afghanistan as the Taliban remains excluded from the SCO and BRICS. Though China has built a pragmatic relationship with the Taliban — See: economic and security — no formal recognition means that the long-term possibility of Afghanistan being re-integrated into global systems is considerably hindered.

According to Rauf (2024), China has been playing most pragmatically with Afghanistan to protect both regional security and economic interests, especially in preventing terrorist elements in its territory Xinjiang. These frameworks can only be effective in dealing with regional challenges with the participation of the Taliban, which is not the position of SCO and BRICS and restricts themselves to dealing with regional issues. Pakistan's pivotal role in aligning with China's Afghan strategy makes its geostrategic importance, India's reluctance to fully embrace the SCO mechanisms demonstrates the deeper regional rivalries that are impairing cooperation.

Russia's participation augments China's efforts but its geopolitical ambitions overlie the relationship. Moscow's vision of fostering Eurasian solidarity and countering Western hegemony complements, but also poses a competitive challenge to Beijing's ambitions, particularly in Central Asia, where Russia's historic influence has long dominated (Hakimi, 2022). On their level, China and Russia desire to bring options to develop models led by the West, but the approaches draw doubt from the Western powers and broaden the global geopolitical conflicts.

Furthermore, the Taliban government has been sanctioned by the US and its allies, also has frozen \$9 billion in Afghan assets, crippling its economy and limiting access to global finances (Hakimi, 2022). These sanctions challenge China-Taliban economic cooperation, complicating Beijing's plans to integrate Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative and tap into its resource bases (Shah, 2023). International recognition further hampers infrastructure projects and economic partnerships, adding to the hurdles in leveraging Afghanistan's strategic potential (Grare & Rehman, 2022).

Hence, this play of dynamics between China, Pakistan, Iran, India, and Russia further underlines the complexity of Afghanistan's role in regional and global geopolitics. While initiatives such as BRI can bring about deeper economic integration, deterrence through the Taliban's exclusion from key international platforms is another layer to the greater issue of potential counterpart legitimacy and cooperation (Rauf, 2022). As such, the future trajectory of Afghanistan will depend on the ability of global and regional powers to avoid these challenges in a multipolar world order.

### **Discussion and Analyses**

China's relationship with Afghanistan's Taliban government functions as an intricate combination of international diplomacy which protects border regions and establishes greater regional peace through geo-economic interests alongside realistic strategies and international geopolitical factors. The relationship between Beijing and Kabul encounters multiple complications because the Taliban lacks international recognition and Afghanistan encounters economic limitations and basic infrastructure and security threats together with ongoing Western economic sanctions against the Taliban since they won control of the country (Encarnation, and Fair, 2023). An evaluation of these elements examines how China's policy decisions connect to its internal contradictions and global



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

impact on regional affairs.

Despite the Taliban's absence of international recognition, Beijing engages with the regime as part of a comprehensive strategy that places national interest ahead of international norms and the so-called established standards. Because of a pragmatic mindset that prioritizes national survival over ideological convictions, China has secured Taliban assurances to refrain from harboring Eastern Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) fighters in Afghan soil who seek to create an Islamic state in China's Xinjiang region a Muslim-populated region bordering with Afghanistan (Ahmad et al., 2025). Even though ETIM was part of the struggle with the Taliban in Afghanistan to create the so-called Islamic government in Kabul if the Taliban take any action against their former allies, it will be a betrayal and also dent the ideology of establishing Islamic Kalafat is the core basis of Jihadist across the globe (Samad, 2025). Hence the Taliban's priority is also the economic goals over the ideology and brotherhood. At the same time, China conducts its foreign engagements through an approach that combines its economic liberal interests with its security-oriented realpolitik values. Regarding the Realpolitik strategy, China emphasizes border security in Western parts, especially from the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) along with other Beijing targets in the Xinjiang autonomous region a majority Muslim area with Afghan borders.

The objectives of Beijing follow geo-economics directions that analyze existing regional integration approaches toward consolidation goals. Beijing uses the Silk Route initiative to establish connections between Eurasian areas through Afghanistan and Central Asia to implement its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) process and future China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) expansions. China extracts untapped mineral reserves of lithium and copper worth of trillion dollars which exist in Afghanistan's ground. The strategic center of Afghanistan allows it to foster regional business unions while developing new trade pathways that lead to the Middle East and Southeast Asia and Central Asia (Klycheva, 2025). The economic plans of Beijing reveal the direction its strategic policies for regional infrastructure expansion and economic unification take. The vital position of Afghanistan on transit routes allows the country to provide efficient goods transit and help create stronger regional economic partnerships. The Beijing government is moving forward with a policy strategy which merges open economic integration systems with realpolitik-led security demands.

Despite the Taliban's ineffective governance China continues to engage in diplomatic efforts toward immediate stability while economic cooperation suffers from unviable barriers. China shows the policy of non-interference in foreign relations as its diplomatic principle but this policy hurts the leadership of Afghan political changes and puts barriers to investments in the Afghan economy. China's policies in Afghanistan towards Afghanistan's neighboring countries created profound effects on other neighboring countries who were close to each other especially China's strategic partnership with Pakistan (Samad, 2025).

The structure of Chinese aid goes through Islamabad because China has direct relations through its BRI partnership and Islamabad demonstrates trusted intermediary capacities due to previous support of the Afghan Taliban. Despite economic and political problems within its borders Pakistan cannot maintain its credibility despite having fragile relations with the new Taliban government in Kabul. The Durand line that separates Afghanistan and Pakistan has never been accepted by Kabul since Pakistan's independence. The second most significant



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

challenge to Pakistan is the Terik E Taliban Pakistan (TTP), one of the important and old allies of the Afghan Taliban, seeking to establish Islamic Kalafat in Pakistan from Afghanistan soil. Islamabad wants strong action against TTP but Afghan Taliban can't fight with their old partners- the Pakistani Taliban (Fazli et al., 2025).

Additionally, India sees Beijing's geopolitical ambitions in South Asia especially in Afghanistan as an encircling ploy against New Delhi that establishes growing instability in the region. Formerly, in South Asia competition was between Pakistan and India to become the policeman of the region but Beijing's geoeconomic activities in South Asia have alarmed India. Further India has also lost billions of investments in Afghanistan's infrastructure that had invested under the US government. Similarly, Iran and Russia work with China to eliminate terrorism and drug trafficking yet they perceive China's economic power as a threat to their future regional geoeconomic standing (Khan et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the global Western power systems face problems because China bases its foreign policy on economic pragmatism by partnering with the Taliban while ignoring their lack of political progress. China defends its multipolar approach through this policy yet the Western world perceives it as enabling and strengthening authoritarian rule in Afghanistan. Chinese economic initiatives in Afghanistan have operated independently of Western interests since 2021 (Hasar, 2025). As ISIS-K gains power in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, it poses a threat to both the stability of the nation and Chinese investment there. China's attempts to develop secure financial investments are threatened by the Taliban's incapacity to control insurgent factions and their poor governance. There hasn't been much international cooperation because China and other governments continue to view Afghanistan as a source of security difficulties (Amir, 2023).

Second, the unpredictability poses operational risks to China's efforts under the Belt and Road Initiative. There are three core sectors involving trade routes and resource extraction plus infrastructure security that entail heavy costs for their safety to be maintained. Historically, Beijing depended on Pakistan to mediate between Beijing and the Taliban yet Islamabad has struggled to keep peaceful ties with the Taliban because they recently established authority while fighting its domestic security issues. Afghanistan needs proper recognition for its participation in this developing system (Farhadi, 2025) Taliban leadership wants to develop diplomatic ties because they wish to depend on China indirectly but enthusiastically welcome Chinese diplomatic backing and financial support. Chinese diplomatic initiatives produce various challenges for border-area support negotiations in Afghanistan. The ongoing Taliban administration receives significant security risks from China through unstable methods of performing ongoing protection work. China confronts several conflicts characterized by managerial difficulties and sanction problems as it competes with neighbors for security interests and economic development to ensure stability. The strategic challenges facing stem from how multiple powers attempt multipolar navigation during priority systems' evolution. Beijing's achievement in Afghanistan depends on its capacity to protect affairs of fundamental importance without endangering security requirements while it reshapes its policies to meet these current conditions (Rizwan and Ahmed, 2025).

However, the economic and diplomatic relations between China's Communist



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

Party of China (CPC) and the Taliban function by conducting mutual practical activities instead of sharing political and ideological views. China continues to interact with the Taliban despite ideological differences because economic cooperation and safety requirements become substantially more important for any state. China maintains contacts with the Afghan Taliban because of the protection of its investments against all hostile elements present in the region. Also, the Chinese government finds business avenues via Afghan passageways as they invest soundly into the region's plenty of natural endowments (Villegas-Cruz, 2025). Afghanistan has scanty hope of exercising regional power influence due to its persistent economic failures and insecurity challenges combined with the Taliban's exclusive government. It is the basic structure in which Beijing interacts with its foreign partners - stability combined with economic development. Further, the Taliban has strong ties with ETIM and TTP in China and Pakistan and even they fought together against American forces in Afghanistan to establish an Islamic government. Taliban needs economic and technical support to run government affairs and China is the only country that can help the Taliban so the Taliban has to choose either ideological partners like ETIM and TTP or economic partners like China and Pakistan.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In its relationship with the Taliban regime, China pursues a polity that combines realpolitik with geo-economics. China's strategy is focused on securing its western borders, tap into Afghanistan untapped natural resource and preventing extremist threads. China also wants to leverage Afghanistan's strategic location for its advantage. Political instability, weak governance infrastructure and competing regional interests make it difficult for the China in achieving these objectives without harming its noninterference policy.

This paper notes how China's security concerns and economic ambitions are deeply interrelated. While there is potential for success, challenges exist, requiring a future oriented and flexible strategy. Dealing with Afghanistan's instability, China needs to adopt a multidimensional and leered approach.

### **Policy recommendations.**

1. China needs to have a strong relations with the neighboring states like, Pakistan, Russian and Central Asian nations to suppress extremists and terrorism related threats (Samad, 2025). It must utilize the platforms like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to prevent extremists groups from using Afghan soil. Intelligence sharing and with the neighbor state will mitigate terror related activities.
2. Afghanistan has a very weak governance structure. By providing technical assistance, training and infrastructure support, China will help Afghanistan improve its governance. While it might seem interfering, it is in line with the long term policy of having a stable and reliable partner at the western border, which volatile (Setiawati, 2025).
3. India, Pakistan and Russia have conflicting interests in the region and China needs to balance it by offering economic incentives. China must reduce tension though creating platform for discussion, cooperation and regional integration.
4. China needs to diversify its investments, expending them from mineral resource extraction and infrastructure development to environmental



## Vol. 3 No. 4 (April) (2025)

sustainable and educational initiatives. All its projects must confirm to sustainable goals. By adopting this approach, China can engage people and gain their support (Roy and Shahzad, 2025). This will not only help Afghanistan develop its economy but also minimize criticism against Chinese projects as exploitation and debt trap approach.

5. China needs to share Afghanistan's reconstruction responsibilities with international organizations such as United Nations and regional organizations (Dawar and Khan, 2025). These multilateral efforts will further solidify China's leadership positions and create avenues for cooperative rebuilding.
6. Chinese diplomatic relations with the Taliban are a matter of frequent scrutiny among international human rights agencies. Women's rights as a face-saving measure for China: The governance adjustments China, the international community, and its surrounding region could afford would depend on its image.

### Final Thoughts

The Chinese relationship with Afghanistan is based on pragmatic and future oriented strategy; nevertheless, it is not free from challenges. China can overcome these challenges by maintaining a proactive, balanced and an inclusive approach; it can also help advance its security and economic interests. It is clear from the recommendations that it must look beyond traditional noninterference by adopting a more dynamic and collaborative role. China's pragmatic approach in Afghanistan, if successful, it can set an example for model statecraft for rest of the increasingly multipolar world. The path forward needs, resilience, equity and sustainable development, requiring China to make sure its engagement not only benefits itself but also the region and the world at large.

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