

**CHINA'S ROLE IN THE POST US WITHDRAWAL FROM
AFGHANISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION**



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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that this thesis entitled "**China's role in the Post US withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for the Region**" is my original work. This research work was completed under the supervision of Dr. Manzoor Khan Afridi and submitted to the Department of International Relations as satisfying the requirements for the degree of master's in international relations. I have properly referenced and cited the sources of information in my thesis. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree.

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DEDICATION

This research work is whole heartedly dedicated to my Respective parents and family. I dedicate this research to my father Sikander Mehmood for being a great mentor who worked hard for my better education and life. I also dedicate this work to my loving mother Sabiha Talat for being a source of motivation for me. Lastly, I would like to thank my supportive supervisor Dr.Manzoor Khan Afridi. He gave me unconditional support and his words of encouragement helped me to complete my research work.

LISTS OF ABBRIVATIONS

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARs	Central Asian Republics
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GDP	Gross Domestic product
IS-K	Islamic State-Khorasan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRF	National Resistance Force
QCG	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TIP	Turkish Islamic Party
TTP	Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the analysis of China's growing influence in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the US. The study examines China's strategic interest in the region, its relationship with the Afghan government, and its engagement with other regional actors. It argues that China's economic, diplomatic, and security interests in Afghanistan are becoming increasingly important as the country emerges as an important node in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan has initiated a transformational phase in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, with profound implications for neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran. In the context of Pakistan, The post-withdrawal China's engagement represents an opportunity for closer economic cooperation, aligning with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and fostering regional stability. For Iran, China's expanding role introduces the potential for increased regional collaboration and economic integration through projects like the Iran-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This research delves into the multifaceted dimensions of China's involvement, encompassing economic investments, diplomatic efforts, and security considerations. The study concludes that China's growing influence in Afghanistan poses both challenges and opportunities for regional stability and its impacts on Iran and Pakistan too.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The longest war fought by the United States came to an end in August 2021 with the departure from Afghanistan. The effects of the retreat, however, have prompted concerns for the future of the nation and the area as a whole. Afghanistan is a key site for regional politics and trade because to its strategic location on the borders of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Due to the power vacuum created by the US army departure from the region, nations like China have increased their presence there. The stability and politics of the area will be significantly impacted by China's rising involvement in Afghanistan. China has indicated interest in supporting Afghanistan's reconstruction and development, but its engagement would irritate other regional countries, especially the US and India. Since the US has played a significant role in the region for the past 20 years, concerns have been raised about the country's potential future involvement in international affairs. India, on the other hand, and China have a protracted rivalry and are both concerned about China's expanding influence in the area (Roychowdhury, 2021).

The research explores China's participation with Afghanistan from a historical, political, economic, and security perspective, providing a sophisticated view of this intricate bilateral relationship. China pursues a separate strategy in Afghanistan that reflects the unique interests, worries, and objectives of China while mostly adhering to the mainstream of the international community. Although China has several interests in Afghanistan, its domestic worries regarding the security and stability of the predominantly Muslim area of Xinjiang take precedence over all others. China keeps regular and cordial ties with the Afghan government, is involved in the nation's economic recovery, and offers Afghanistan financial help and other support. The research also looks at China's viewpoints on Afghanistan, especially those about security,

terrorism, and extremism in the area. It examines China's attempts to combat the extremism and terrorist threats in Afghanistan as well as the repercussions for the country's internal security. Additionally, the author throws light on China's engagement with Afghanistan within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), stressing China's economic interests and investment projects in Afghanistan as well as their relevance for connectivity and regional development (Hausheng, 2012).

China's participation in Afghanistan may affect the region's security situation as well. Since the Taliban have taken control of Afghanistan, there have been worries that terrorist activities could pick up again, which might affect neighboring nations. China is worried that Uighur terrorists from the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) may operate in Afghanistan and endanger China's regional security interests. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which intends to improve infrastructural connections between Asia, Europe, and Africa, is the main reason for China's involvement in Afghanistan. Afghanistan serves as a key BRI Centre due to its advantageous location and wealth of natural resources. The natural resources of Afghanistan, such as copper, iron, and lithium, which are necessary for the development of renewable energy technologies, have also piqued China's attention.(Kumar, 2021).

The implications of China's expanding role in Afghanistan are profound, especially for neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Both nations share immediate borders with Afghanistan and are intricately woven into the regional fabric. The implications encompass economic opportunities, security challenges, and shifts in regional power dynamics, all of which demand careful analysis and consideration. In Pakistan, the deepening relationship with China presents an opportunity for enhanced economic integration and infrastructure development under

the umbrella of CPEC. Simultaneously, Pakistan must navigate a changing regional power dynamic, which could reshape its geopolitical landscape. Iran, with its historical ties and immediate geographical proximity to Afghanistan, finds itself at a unique crossroads.(Kumar, 2021). China's growing presence may open doors for increased regional collaboration, trade, and investment. However, it could also raise concerns about Iran's autonomy in shaping the region's future and potentially necessitate a reassessment of its regional and international alliances.

China is eager to get involved in the growth and restoration of Afghanistan, especially with infrastructure initiatives like the TAPI gas pipeline and the rail link between China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Turkmenistan's natural gas would travel 1,814 km along the TAPI gas pipeline to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. A vital link between Central Asia and South Asia would be made possible by the railway line that would unite the three nations. China has also sent Afghanistan medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccinations as help. The United States and India are concerned about China's growing participation in Afghanistan because they see it as a way for China to strengthen its influence and undermine their strategic interests. India is particularly concerned about China's backing of Pakistan and the possibility that China may use its sway in Afghanistan to sow unrest in India's Kashmir region (Bajoria, 2021).

Following the abrupt withdrawal of the United States from Kabul, Beijing's strategic considerations on Afghanistan remain focused on security concerns in order to establish a stronger presence in Central Asia. Afghanistan, known as the "graveyard of empires," has seen more than 40 years of violence, with a brief period of relative peace occurring in the middle of the 2000s. The country in South Asia is once more under Taliban rule, with increased Chinese participation. Beijing swiftly increased the number of high-level visits in the months before

Washington left, pledged to include Afghanistan in its major projects linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and maintained an open diplomatic representation alongside Iran, Pakistan. In mid-May, President Xi Jinping chaired the inaugural China-Central Asia Summit to enhance Beijing's multilateral ties with the former "-stan" states, with Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction efforts being placed in the eighth and final position of the official press release. Therefore, while Afghanistan itself does not play a decisive role in the PRC's regional policymaking objectives, Kabul does provide even greater cross-regional connection across the Eurasian landmass into Iran and the Middle East. (Sattar, 2023).

Investment opportunities in Afghanistan also present another potential alternative for Beijing to diversify its access to critical minerals and energy supplies overland against Western maritime interdiction in the first island chain. In the end, Beijing's interests are based on realpolitik considerations as the world's second-largest economy strives to gain a competitive edge vis-à-vis its regional competitors. China's primary goal in unstable Afghanistan is to maintain a semblance of peace in order to stop terrorist activity from spreading to its borders. The main problem, according to CCP officials, is the continuous separatist movement of the Uyghur's, an ethnic minority of Turkic Muslims living in China's Xinjiang autonomous territory in the northwest, which is the sole area sharing a border with Afghanistan.(Kumar, 2021).

China has claimed for decades that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which was formerly listed as a foreign terrorist organisation by the United States, had connections to Islamist organisations outside. Concerns on the emergence of terrorism inside the group's boundaries following the U.S. exit have been raised by the group's purported ties to the former Taliban regime. The so-called Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) reportedly vowed to launch strikes

in China and Iran in May 2022, according to BBC Monitoring. Long-term targets of IS-K and other militant groups against Taliban rule in Afghanistan are likely to be Chinese assets and personnel, as Beijing becomes a more conspicuous non-Muslim nation in Central Asia while simultaneously clamping down on the Muslim minority, the Uyghur's, inside its borders. (Sattar, 2023).

China has several advantages. The Taliban want financial assistance from China and some shielding from UN Security Council sanctions when they were last in power. Although Beijing has far more resources at its disposal and feels more at ease threatening to veto legislation than it did at the beginning of the millennium, those elements remain unchanged. China is one of the few options available to the Taliban in a situation where they are aware that the West would not provide them with genuine economic support, at least not without terms they will find intolerable. (Glaser, 2021). There is still some goodwill remaining because Beijing gave the Taliban money and weapons when they were in exile and made investments during their final years in power.

To assess what may be offered, the Taliban need only consider Beijing's economic responsibilities in the region and the diplomatic protection Beijing offers Pakistan. China may offer these incentives to a government that is probably facing challenges on the diplomatic and economic fronts. Beijing may also rely on its ties with Pakistan. It is blatantly incorrect to follow the conventional wisdom that claims that since China can influence Pakistan to do anything it wants and Pakistan can influence the Taliban to do whatever it wants, China can also influence the Taliban to do whatever it wants. Beijing has become more cognizant of both its own and Pakistan's limitations as a result of the experience it has gained over the last ten years, especially

with the Afghan peace negotiations. However, Beijing will undoubtedly demand that its friends in Pakistan go above and beyond during this time to make sure that the Islamist militant movement, which they supported and hosted and about which China has always expressed strong reservations, does not negatively impact Chinese interests now that it is in power. (Glaser, 2021).

China's propaganda apparatus has been disseminating false information on the abrupt withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, citing it as proof of the country's decline as a power and an untrustworthy friend. The swift withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan is seen as the third indication of the erosion of American hegemony, after the global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. Beijing has also taken use of the occasion to mock US military actions abroad, branding it as "the world's largest exporter of unrest" according to China's official news agency, Xinhua. The fact that China benefitted from the U.S. and NATO military presence in Afghanistan, which brought some degree of stability, is not mentioned in Chinese media. Beijing intends to undermine US alliance networks in Europe and Asia by spreading this story in an effort to raise questions in the capitals of US allies about Beijing's ability to defend them in an emergency. (Bonnie, 2021). China aims to improve its reputation internationally and set itself apart from the US and NATO in terms of foreign policy by promoting its non-interference policy in other nations. Beijing is sending a somewhat mixed message in its official comments, saying that rather than just cutting and running, the US and its partners should take steps to guarantee peace and stability in Afghanistan.

1.2 Statement of the problem

China's growing Influence in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal poses challenges to regional stability and could further fuel ongoing conflicts in the country. Here are some of the opportunities and potential implications of China's role in the post-US Afghanistan era. China can strengthen its economic ties with Afghanistan and the surrounding region through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This can lead to increased trade, infrastructure development, and economic growth in the region. China's involvement in Afghanistan can serve as a counterbalance to the influence of the United States in the region. It can position China as a key player in shaping the future of Central and South Asia. Beijing has already increased its political, economic, and security cooperation with Afghanistan since US announced its withdrawal plan, including providing aid and investing infrastructure projects. However, china's interest in Afghanistan are not limited to commercial gains. Afghanistan strategic location, rich mineral resources, and potential to join the belt and road initiative (BRI) make it an important partner of China's geopolitical Agenda in region. It seeks to offer valuable insights into the motivations, strategies, and potential impacts of China's involvement on regional dynamics, international relations, and the Afghan people. This study attempts to analyze the China's growing influence in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal presents several challenges for regional stability and ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

1.3 Significance of the Study

China's growing influence in Afghanistan is a significant development with implications for the region. China is a major power with a growing economy and a keen interest in securing its energy and trade routes. Afghanistan is a strategically located country with vast mineral

resources, making it an attractive target for Chinese investment. China's growing influence in Afghanistan could have a number of positive examples, China could help to promote economic development and stability in Afghanistan, which would benefit the Afghan people and the region as a whole. However, China's growing influence in Afghanistan could also have some negative impacts. China could use its influence to extract unfair concessions from Afghanistan to its global ambitions. This study would provide an in-depth analysis of China's growing influence in Afghanistan both in positive and negative perspectives. The analytical nature of this study would be helpful to elaborate the main aim of China's involvement in Afghanistan. It may also help policy makers in Afghanistan to develop strategies to maintain relations with China carefully. Being an open-ended research, this study would provide a new path of research to next researchers for their studies.

1.4 Research objectives

- 1: To analyze the China's growing influence and role in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal.
- 2: To explore the regional implications of China's growing influence in Afghanistan for the Pakistan and Iran.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1: What is the China's growing influence and role in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal?
- 2: How the China's growing influence in Afghanistan are creating implications for the region (Pakistan, Iran)?

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The research due to immense scope has few delimitation as:

For the research topic: “Post US Afghanistan: Analyzing Chinese Role”, here are some limitations

1. The study will specifically focus on such as the role of china in Afghanistan post US withdrawal from 2021 to 2023.
2. The Study will particularly focus on the region or aspect of China involvement, like China’s economic investment in Afghanistan or its diplomatic efforts in the region.
3. The research will mainly focus on Chinese involvement, such as China’s political, economic, security interest in Afghanistan, and focus on one or more of these aspects. And the other aspect discuss in this research China’s humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, such as aid and development projects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The US's 20-year military presence in Afghanistan will end in August 2021, and the geopolitical environment in the region will have undergone a considerable change. China is anticipated to have a significant influence in determining how Afghanistan will develop after the US leaves. In this study of the literature, we will look at the research that has already been done on China's involvement in Afghanistan after the US left and give a summary of what is known at this time. After a humiliating 20-year engagement, the United States' humiliating exit from Afghanistan in August 2021 left China as the dominant power in the area, with the potential to play a key role in Afghan politics in the future, which might be governed by a resurgent Taliban(Zhang, 2022)..

After the US withdrawal China has five engagement strategy for Afghanistan, which includes (i) preventing the country from reemerging as a haven for terrorists, (ii) pragmatically and cautiously accepting the Taliban's dominance in Afghan affairs, (iii) fostering inclusive politics in the country, (iv) demonstrating a higher level of humanitarian concern, and (v) holding the US and the West accountable for failing to fulfil their obligations. Undoubtedly, China's strategy has developed into one that is more proactive and advantageous, but it continues to be constrained by significant barriers, not the least of which are its concerns about the Taliban and its intensifying competition with the United States (Zhang, 2022).

At the Fourth China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, held in Guiyang, China on June 3, 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar, and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi discussed various challenges to Afghan peace in the wake of the statement of the unilateral U.S. military

withdrawal. While the challenges from the exit of U.S. troops were identified as the potential for strife and civil war, the opportunities highlighted included the prospects for the Afghan people to decide their own political destiny. Expressing China's willingness "to work with all stakeholders of Afghanistan, including Pakistan, to make more efforts to promote peace talks and mediation," Wang offered to play the role of mediator by hosting "an intra-Afghan dialogue at an appropriate time." (Yi, 2021)

The four following aspects of Chinese policy towards Afghanistan have influenced it and will do so going forward: Afghanistan's relevance to China's broader foreign policy, (ii) the security and stability of China's western border region and the northwest province of Xinjiang, (iii) great power politics, particularly those involving the United States, and (iv) Afghanistan's economic significance. These variables impact how China will maintain and change its policy following the US exit. Despite the fact that it will surely expand, China is well aware of the constraints of foreign assistance, which will restrict American future assistance in rebuilding Afghanistan. (Zhang, 2022). Due to the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in order to concentrate on competing with China in the Indo Pacific, China's perception of the US is outraged at both the devastation Washington has left in Afghanistan and its recalibrating of its strategic assault against it. The two nations' growing hostility prevents them from cooperating on Afghanistan in a meaningful way, despite the fact that it is plainly necessary and, if successful, would assist to diminish their competitiveness. One of the first few countries to legally recognize the People's Republic of China, which was then led by the Communist Party of China, was Afghanistan in January 1955.

China is currently the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan after winning the bid for oil exploration in the Amu Darya basin in northern Afghanistan, acquiring the US\$4.4 billion extraction contract to develop the Mes Aynak copper field located in the province of Logar, and building extensive railway infrastructure in the nation. The China-Afghanistan Special Railway Transportation Project and the Five Nations Railway Project, which connect China with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, respectively, have also been established by China (Stratfor, 2018).

The literature's main takeaway is that China's involvement in Afghanistan is largely motivated by economic factors. China, a country with an energy-hungry population, has been interested in the abundant natural resources of Afghanistan, such as copper, iron, gold, and lithium. Afghanistan is thought to have undeveloped mineral resources worth \$1 trillion, according to a US Geological Survey report, making it one of the wealthiest mining locations in the world (Katzman, 2012).

A crucial position for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a vast infrastructural development project aiming at connecting China with Europe and Africa, as well as natural riches are offered by Afghanistan. China's access to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf is made possible by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a vital link in the BRI. A crucial node in the CPEC, China has made significant investments in the construction of the Gwadar Port in Pakistan and has been looking into methods to expand the corridor to Afghanistan (Bhatia, 2021).

China has furthermore contributed significantly to the Afghan peace effort. China was one of the four nations that made up the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which was

established in 2016 to help smooth negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. China has maintained contact with the Taliban and urged for a “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned” peace process despite the QCG's failure to produce any major progress (Bhadrakumar, 2021).

Nonetheless, grave worries about the state of regional security appear to eclipse the largely jubilant remarks on the West's failure. However, from Beijing's point of view, it may also present chances for collaboration that might further stabilize Afghanistan and the Central Asian area. We may draw attention to a few points from the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission's more thorough study in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of the bilateral relationship between China and Afghanistan. The primary finding is that China has approached Afghanistan with extreme caution.(Bhatia, 2021).

The main concerns are security-related, and Beijing has not been making investments quickly. Experts generally concurred that, at this point, China's connections with the Taliban administration are just necessary, and that the US and China have similar interests in the area. It is recognized that China's primary objective is to establish a stable administration in Afghanistan that will strengthen its standing both nationally and internationally. Having a neighbor that is not viewed as a pariah state or sanctioned is advantageous to China. The Taliban must also sever any connections with international terrorist organisations, in particular, these ties must be broken with Uyghur groups, who are viewed as Beijing's biggest danger. Additionally, it is clearly evident that the nation's and the region's security concerns will be a must for any future prospects for economic cooperation. With the prospect of potentially much greater investments in the Afghani economy, Beijing will undoubtedly take on a more significant role for Afghanistan going forward.(Bhatia, 2021).

2.1 Research Gap

The above literature discusses the China's growing influence in Afghanistan in extensive detail. Moreover Afghanistan's geopolitical importance for China is briefly explained. The above literature has shed full light on the topic but the study leaves a gap:

How Afghanistan can fulfill china's global ambitions?

The aim of China's diplomatic engagements with Afghanistan and the brief analysis of China's growing influence in Afghanistan is not provided.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neo-Realism provides a lens through which we can understand China's actions in post-US Afghanistan as driven by its pursuit of power, security, and regional dominance in the context of an anarchic international system. China's strategic moves in Afghanistan should be analyzed within the framework of these Neo-Realist principles to gain insights into its motivations and objectives.

Neo-realism, as expounded by scholars like Kenneth Waltz, focuses on states as rational actors driven by self-interest and the pursuit of power. Neo-Realism emphasizes the importance of states seeking to maintain or shift the balance of power in their favor. With the US withdrawing from Afghanistan, a power vacuum has emerged in the region. China may perceive this as an opportunity to expand its influence and solidify its position as a regional power (Waltz, 1979).

Neo-realism holds that nations put their existence and security above everything else. Like every other state, China is required to take actions that will strengthen its security and safeguard its territorial integrity. China may view the US exit from Afghanistan as a chance to bolster its influence and protect its western frontiers, which are susceptible to extremism and instability coming from the country. Neo-realism gives the allocation of power among nations a great deal of weight. The possible shift in the power dynamics in the area brought about by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan presents both possibilities and problems for China and other regional players. According to neo-realist theory, China would try to take advantage of the power vacuum created by the US exit to strengthen its own clout in Afghanistan and the surrounding area, tipping the scales of power in its favour.

According to the neo-realist theory of the security dilemma, nations' attempts to strengthen their security may unintentionally increase tensions and hostilities with other states. Other regional actors, like Russia or India, may view China's efforts to control its borders and stop the spread of extremism as threatening or destabilizing in light of its participation in Afghanistan. This can make the security issues already present in the area worse and raise rivalry and conflict.

According to neorealism, nations would act in a counterbalancing manner to counter the might of possible adversaries. China may operate in a balanced manner towards other regional actors with interests in the region, such as Russia, Pakistan, India, or Afghanistan. To strengthen China's position and stop the formation of an adversarial coalition against it, this may entail military deployments, diplomatic ploys, or strategic partnerships.

In Neo-Realism, the primary concern of states is their own security. China shares a border with Afghanistan through its Xinjiang region, which is susceptible to instability and extremist threats. China's involvement in Afghanistan can be seen as an effort to enhance its security by preventing the spread of extremism across its borders. China's engagement in Afghanistan can be interpreted as part of a broader strategy to establish regional dominance in South and Central Asia. By doing so, China aims to ensure its security and protect its interests. Neo-Realism underscores the competitive nature of international politics. China's increasing role in Afghanistan may be perceived as a challenge by other regional actors, such as India and Russia.(Waltz , 2000). This competition for influence can lead to complex regional dynamics. Neo-Realism also emphasizes the significance of power projection. China's growing economic and military presence in Afghanistan can be viewed as part of its broader strategy to project power beyond its borders, both regionally and globally Geopolitical realism emphasizes the role of power dynamics and

state interests in shaping international relations. From this perspective, China's involvement in Afghanistan can be understood as a strategic maneuver to expand its influence in the region following the US withdrawal.

Realist scholars argue that states act in their own self-interest, seeking to maximize power and security. China's rising global status and its desire to secure its western borders and counter potential security threats provide incentives for increased engagement in Afghanistan (Mearsheimer,2001).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) serves as a theoretical framework for understanding its economic interests in Afghanistan. The BRI aims to enhance connectivity and promote economic development through infrastructure projects spanning Asia, Africa, and Europe. Afghanistan's strategic location as a potential transit hub for BRI projects offers economic opportunities for China, driving its investment and engagement in the country (Jacques,2012).

Security concerns, particularly related to counterterrorism and stability maintenance, shape China's involvement in Afghanistan. China views stability in Afghanistan as crucial for preventing the spread of extremism and separatism into its Xinjiang region. Therefore, China may prioritize security cooperation, intelligence-sharing, and peace-building efforts in Afghanistan to mitigate security threats and safeguard its interests (Friedberg, 2011)

China's diplomatic approach to Afghanistan can be analyzed through the lens of soft power and diplomatic engagement. By offering economic assistance, development projects, and

diplomatic support, China aims to build goodwill and enhance its image as a responsible global actor contributing to peace and stability in the region (Nye,2004).

State Behavior and Security Concerns

Neorealism is concerned with the actions of states in the international system characterized by anarchy and where the primary concern is security. Applying neorealism to China's involvement in Afghanistan, it means that China's actions are mainly motivated by security factors. Due to the threats of having the instabilities in Afghanistan affecting the other Central Asian states and China's Xinjiang province Beijing values stability in Afghanistan to avoid terrorism and separatism. Thus, economic investments and diplomatic activities of China are to strengthen its borders and to prevent the penetration of extraneous forces that can provoke the destabilization of the situation.(Waltz, 1979, Mearsheimer, 2001, Scobell , 2014).

Balance of Power and Regional Influence

Neorealism focuses on the distribution of power and how states align themselves in relation to other significant powers. In the context of Afghanistan, China's actions can be described as part of its policy to contain other regional powers – Russia and the United States, in particular. In this context, through the economic projects such as BRI and infrastructure investments to connect the region, China aims at strengthening its position in Afghanistan and other countries and consolidating its role as the key actor in the region.(Buzan & Lawson, 2015,Scobell, Ratner, & Beckley, 2014, Rolland, 2017).

Relative Gains and Economic Interests

Thus, Neorealism also looks at how states view distribution of power in their relations. In Afghanistan, it is the Chinese economic gains, especially in mining resources including lithium and copper, weighed against the threats and expenses of engagement. China's approach can be summed up as weighing the economic gains against the possible threats to security, thus showing a realistic aim at economic benefits while at the same time, avoiding the negative implications of insecurity in Afghanistan.(Rolland, 2017).

International Institutions and Multilateral Engagements

Unlike neorealism which majorly focuses on state behavior, it recognizes the function of international organizations and diplomatic relations in the states' relations. In Afghanistan China uses the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other multilateral platforms to encourage the Afghan-led processes of peace and stability in the region. This engagement shows that China has understood that cooperation with other states in the international system can help it achieve its security and economic goals in a rather insecure region of the world. Therefore, when analysing China's involvement in post-US Afghanistan using neorealism, one comes across the concepts of security, economic, and strategic concerns. The Chinese involvement in Afghanistan can be described as a calculation of their national interest that is to stabilize Afghanistan and secure its strategic position in the region together with the opportunities of economic gains without risking too much in the process.(Buzan & Lawson, 2015,Rolland, 2017).

Power Transition Theory explains global shifts in power dynamics and predicts that major conflicts often arise when a rising power challenges the dominant status quo. In this context, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan has provided China with an opportunity to increase its influence, thus shifting regional power balances.

China's Rising Influence

With the US withdrawal, China, as a rising power, finds itself in a position to exert more influence in Afghanistan. According to Power Transition Theory, this kind of shift can destabilize established orders if not managed carefully. China's interests include securing its western borders, integrating Afghanistan into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and accessing Afghanistan's natural resources (Wang & Gao, 2022). By engaging diplomatically with the Taliban and offering economic incentives, China is asserting its role as a regional stabilizer (Zhao, 2023).

China's Strategic Moves

China's approach contrasts with the US's strategy, focusing more on economic cooperation and non-interference rather than military involvement. This strategy is evident in China's discussions with the Taliban on potential investments and infrastructure projects, aimed at promoting stability while safeguarding Chinese interests (Li, 2023). This diplomatic engagement underlines China's ambition to fill the power vacuum left by the US (Hu, 2022).

Implications for the Region

Pakistan: Pakistan stands to benefit from China's growing influence. As a close ally, Pakistan's collaboration with China is likely to deepen, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This partnership could strengthen Pakistan's strategic position, aligning it closely with China's broader regional objectives (Ahmad & Khan, 2022).

Iran: Iran views China as a valuable partner, particularly as both countries are wary of US influence. Iran might coordinate more closely with China and Pakistan to counterbalance other regional players like Saudi Arabia and India (Ebrahimi & Salehi, 2023). This alignment could foster greater regional cooperation but might also fuel rivalries with nations outside this alliance.

Power Transition and Potential Conflicts

Power Transition Theory suggests that as China's influence grows, regional powers like India may feel threatened, leading to potential conflicts. India's concerns over China's increased presence in Afghanistan could escalate regional tensions, especially if these developments are perceived as a direct challenge to India's security and influence in South Asia (Singh, 2023).

Regional Stability and the New Order

China's strategy of economic engagement and non-military intervention could enhance stability in Afghanistan and the broader region. However, according to Power Transition Theory, such transitions are often accompanied by uncertainty and the potential for instability if key stakeholders are not properly integrated into the emerging order (Zhou, 2023). While China aims for stability, its ability to manage complex relationships with the Taliban, Pakistan, and neighboring countries will determine whether this transition leads to long-term peace or new tensions.

Conclusion

Applying Power Transition Theory illustrates how China is capitalizing on the US withdrawal to reshape regional dynamics in its favor. As China rises in influence, traditional

powers like India and possibly even Russia may react, leading to a complex mix of cooperation and competition in the region. For neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran, this shift provides opportunities but also brings challenges that will define the future balance of power.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The research is based on qualitative method. This research would be an analytical and exploratory type to explain the importance of China's role in the post US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Secondary and primary sources such as books, journalist, articles and reports have been used for study. Certainly conducting qualitative research on the topic China's role in the post US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its Implications for Region involves a systematic approach to-gather analyze and interpret data in a comprehensive manner. The research methodology for the study has comprised several key components.

4.2 Data Collection

Data Sources

Primary Sources: Data have been collected through , policymakers, journalist and individuals with knowledge of China's involvement in Afghanistan and the region.This Study provides qualitative insights and firsthand perspectives.

Secondary data have been gathered from scholarly articles, government reports, policy documents, and news sources to provide historical context and support primary findings.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Document analysis involves a systematic review of existing literature, policy documents, and reports.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. Themes are developed alliteratively, and sub-themes will be established to categorize findings.

Qualitative Analysis

Data from surveys are analyzed thematically to extract insights into China's role and its impact on the region. Qualitative data analysis software is employed for systematic coding and categorization.

4.5 Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations are paramount, particularly in survey. Informed consent is obtained from participants, and anonymity is ensured. All data are handled in compliance with relevant ethical guidelines and data protection regulations.

5. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study divided into three chapters:

Chapter No: 01

Introduction.

Chapter No: 02

China's Growing Influence in Afghanistan.

Chapter No: 03

China's Growing Influence in Afghanistan: Regional Implications

CHAPTER TWO

AFGHANISTAN SINCE TALIBAN TAKEOVER 2021

2.1 Introduction

After a twenty-year war, the Taliban, a fundamentalist Islamic organisation with a large Pashtun population, return to power in Afghanistan in 2021. It was not long, less than 10 years after the first rule was conquered by an invasion led by the United States of America in 2001, the Taliban regrouped in Pakistan across the border and began to regain lost ground. The Taliban retook control in August 2021. In a 2020 peace agreement with the organisation, the US pulled its final enduring forces out of Afghanistan at the same time as its rapid advance. While the Taliban has promised to respect the rights of women and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, they have upheld a strict interpretation of sharia law. Meanwhile, the Taliban has been unable to provide Afghans with sufficient food and economic hope as the group has transitioned from a militant group to a governing body. Taliban still threatens Afghans' civil and political rights enshrined in the constitution formed by the government supported by the United States. Since taking over the country, the Taliban have engaged in activities that were characteristic of their regime in the late 1990s.(Bajoria, 2021).

The UN operation in Afghanistan has been accused of violating a lot of human rights. Due to threats from the journalists and restriction to press freedom by the Taliban, nearly two hundred news organizations have been shut down. Activists and demonstrators have been followed and some have been compelled to disappear as their government has ramped up repression. Also, they restored its Ministry of the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice, which in the earlier regime prohibited behaviors deemed sinful according to the Sharia law.

They commanded the judges in November 2022 to apply their interpretation of sharia; in the following weeks, authorities resumed public hidings and executions (Maizland, 2023)

The UNDP argues that the progress made by Afghans in terms of their concept of life in the two decades following the U. S. invasion has also been erased by the Taliban. In a study conducted in October 2022, the organisation said that almost everyone in Afghanistan was poor. Since the takeover, the economy has shrunk between 20 and 30%, and there have been an estimated 700,000 job losses. Over 90% of the population has been distress from some form of food insecurity. Worsening the situation is a reduction in aid by some countries and international organizations that have been the propeller of the economy and public health sector. Likewise, the seizure put an abrupt halt to the fight between the Taliban militants and Afghan security forces and the Americans. There is an overall improvement in the level of security in the country and there are fewer civilian casualties.(Bajoria, 2021).

However, there is still much bloodshed, especially since the terrorist organization Islamic State in Khorasan has been targeting civilians more frequently around the nation. Global and regional security concerns are still expressed by international observers because the Taliban finance terrorists, including al-Qaeda. In particular, after Afghanistan did not extradite Osama bin Laden, the organizer of the 9/11 tragedy, the United States bombed the country. While the Taliban have stated that they will not allow Afghanistan to be used against the security of any other country, analysts have said that under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan could become a breeding ground for terrorists who plan attacks on the United States and its allies.(Maizland, 2023).

The UN monitoring team for the Taliban in its report of April 2022 noted that the organisation is ‘still in proximity’ to al-Qaeda and that ‘al-Qaeda enjoys a sanctuary under the Taliban and enhanced operational freedom’. In fact, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaeda chief, was killed in Kabul in August by a US drone strike. It was said that Zawahiri was living in a house belonging to a Taliban assistant and it is believed that other al-Qaeda officers are also living there. The UN study also suggests that al-Qaeda is likely to be involved in recruiting, training and fund raising within Afghanistan though it is unlikely to stage a global strike before at the earliest 2023. (Maizland, 2023).

After Zawahiri’s death, a leaked U. S. charge stated that al-Qaeda has failed to reestablish itself in Afghanistan, but some analysts did not concur. Moreover, there has been a rise in violence near the border of Afghanistan with Pakistan, which has been known to support the Taliban. Pakistan is alleged to have supported the Taliban financially and in terms of logistics during the war with the U. S. although this is a matter of controversy. Tehrik-e-Taliban, a militant group also known as the Pakistani Taliban has been emboldened by the return to power of the Taliban.(Squires, 2021)

In late 2022, the group resumed hostility with the Pakistani government and launched attacks across the country. Afghan Taliban has been accused by Pakistani officials of offering the militants a sanctum in Afghanistan. The Afghan mujahideen or the Islamic guerrilla warriors who had fought the Soviet invasion of their country (1979–1989) with the indirect help of CIA and its Pakistani counterpart ISI, Inter-Services Intelligence board of directors established the group in the early nineties. Younger Pashtun tribesmen who attended the Pakistani madrassas, or seminaries, connected the word ‘student’ in Pashto to Taliban. Pashtuns are spread across a range in Afghanistan and are the largest ethnic group in a great deal of the country’s south and east.

They are also one of the major ethnic groups in North and West Pakistan. During the period 1992–1996 the mujahideen fought among themselves as different factions were unable to unify and take control of the country, but in the early 2000s the movement gained popularity among the public by promising to restore order and the rule of law. (Jalal, 2021). In November 1994, the Taliban seized the lawless southern city of Kandahar and by September 1996 they had removed Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik whom they believed to be corrupt and anti-Pashtun from the capital Kabul. The following year the Taliban declared Afghanistan as an Islamic emirate with the amir al-mu'minin or the 'commander of the faithful' as Mullah Mohammed Gaited, an veteran of the fight against Soviets About 90% of the country was under the control of the Taliban regime before its collapse in 2001.(Maizland, 2023).

2.2 Taliban of the 1990s vs Taliban of 2021

The Taliban have demonstrated the “new” political discourse since they seized the power, at least in what they say to the media. In fact, the group still holds the same principles it held in the 1990s despite of such propaganda. However, there are some differences between the Taliban of now 2021 and the Taliban of then 1996. The Taliban of 2021 are not passive, but rather engaged and aware of the political processes. They have had the exposure and chance to practice the skills of diplomacy and negotiation due to the fact that the group has had its political office in Doha, Qatar since 2013.(Fisher & Squires, 2021). This is why the Taliban have been courting regional partners such as China and Russia; the latter of which the Taliban stated just recently that China is their 'main and closest partner'.

While the Taliban have often talked about the plight of Muslims across the globe, and especially in Indian Kashmir, the group's leadership has recently avoided making frequent comments about the Uyghur Muslims in China, making this statement rather intriguing. Due to

the new friendly relations between Taliban and China the Uyghurs who were either born in Afghanistan or currently living in Afghanistan are afraid that they may be handed over to China. (Kashgarian, 2021).

The willingness of China to engage the Taliban is evident because Beijing aims to protect its strategic interests in Afghanistan of which resources such as mineral and natural gas are key interests. This is shown by Beijing's latest pledge of USD 31 million for Afghanistan, the report indicates that the decision is another blow. (Wong & Wang, 2021).

The Taliban was able to achieve the "position of strength" and "legitimacy" that they wanted when the US started to recognize the Taliban in the Chantey Doha peace talks. In this regard the Taliban was depicted as a strong and genuine 'peer' actor in peace discourse. Therefore, the Afghan people and the Ghani government in Kabul were relegated to merely surviving along with their neighboring nations. In an interview with Tolo News, translated from the Pashto language, Ziaulhaq Amarkhil, the former Nangarhar provincial governor of Afghanistan described his predictions regarding the ways, in which the negotiations of Washington with the Taliban posed dangers to the Afghan democracy and democratic values, including setting the stage for the failure of the civilian government in Kabul. Amarkhil also said that 'his people' were exhausted, and had had enough of it all after many years of war in the nation, which is why he surrendered Nangarhar province to the Taliban without a battle.(Tolo, 2021).

It was also alleged that the Taliban capitalized on the vulnerability of the Afghan army forces where they even used the forces' 'position of strength and legitimacy against them' and even boasted on their social media platforms about the uploading of the forced surrender videos.

These films which were majorly in the Pashto language circulated widely on social media sites through the group's supporters and fans. (Jalal, 2021).

Lastly, it is needless to mention that the 'new Talib' that one comes across in the western regions is not one who has had his education or training from the madrassa or a religious seminary. The organisation of today opines that the social media, internet and technology offers wider and better propagandas and messages than a madrassa though numerous fighters, militants and terrorists may still tread on the path of the madrassa.(Aggarwal, 2016). Neil Krishan Aggarwal writing for his book "The Taliban's Virtual Emirate" has talked at great lengths about the importance of multifaceted social media messaging to the continual dissemination of the Taliban's message across various parts of South Asia.

In this case, the business may use multilingual communication channels to target the diverse consumers located in different countries. For instance, Zabiullah Mujahid later on some of the group early statements on terrorism and cultural activities that was succeeded by their total control of Afghanistan in an interview with Pakistan's Geo News in Urdu. (Geo, 2021).

Mujahd recalled that people anticipated the enforcement of a Sharia-observant regime and that music was banned in Islam, although the status of music remains ambiguous in the religion. This was in reply to a question on whether the organisation would endorse music and cultural activities. When asked about Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan, an anti-Pakistan terror group, Mujahid said that Pakistan not Afghanistan was the issue that should be a concern for Islamabad. However, days later, the Taliban stuck to their position of not allowing the TTP to launch attacks on Pakistan from Afghanistan when the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, General Faiz Hameed, is in Kabul. (Gul, 2021).

The pragmatic, operational, and fluid approach to the geopolitics of the Taliban was highlighted during Mujahid's statements about the TTP. However, the power of Pakistan remains questionable in the view of many people as they still consider this country as a dominant power in the group. In the same way, Islamabad has already been accused of supporting the Quetta Shura^{Footnote4} against the coalition and Afghan security forces as well as providing covert operational support to the Haqqani Network affiliate of the Taliban. China has been the Taliban's main concern since its coup which reflects the importance of the former in political and economic realms to the latter. The young Afghans who hate Pakistan and its support for the Taliban movement will also present political liabilities and opposition to the regime internally despite the fact that the Taliban is seen as ISI agency project. An audio tape, which was claimed to have been recorded by a Taliban man, suggested that the head of ISI perhaps influenced the Taliban leadership to select specific members of the cabinet during his trip to Kabul. (Gupta, 2021).

Thus, in Afghanistan, the story of the enemy, which is Pakistan and its support for the Taliban, is beginning to take shape. Following the recent visit of the ISI Chief to Afghanistan, Rahmatullah Andar, an ex-Taliban leader, and the spokesman for the National Security Council of the American-backed Afghan government, wrote the following in Pashto on twitter. Nevertheless, relations with foreign states are necessary, while reliance on Pakistan and Iran (as in the present circumstances) is a burden on our nation. They have not (ever) supported Afghanistan in a positive manner. Taliban should understand that such activities (hosting Pakistan's intelligence chief) would only fuel more stories against them the Taliban (Andar, 2021).

As to the question of whether Pakistan benefits solely from a Taliban-controlled Kabul, it is worth mentioning that in addition to Pakistan, a number of other regional players, including Russia, China, Qatar, and to some extent Iran, also worked to persuade the Taliban to negotiate. When it came to confronting terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, Beijing and Moscow believed that Taliban in Kabul, not the former civilian Ghani government, could alleviate some of their concerns. (Chan, 2021).

As a result, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai the deputy head of the Taliban's political office in Doha used Radio and Television to propagate the importance of the regional powers and the desire of the Taliban to engage the regional powers in political and economic relationship. (Ghaznavi, 2021).

Even more astonishing was the fact that Stanikzai also mentioned India. He said that he wished the new Taliban regime to establish trade, business, and cultural ties with the New Delhi. Nevertheless, though the Taliban has in the past targeted India for its brutal treatment of Muslims in Indian Kashmir, the mention of India does reveal its plan of regional entanglement at various levels. (Khare, 2021).

However, since Beijing and Moscow have officially declared their willingness to negotiate with the Taliban, it can also be viewed that the inclusion of China and Russia by the Taliban is a pressure tactic to bring the US sanctions out. The Taliban have been out of the international banking for a long time now, especially after the United States imposed several sanctions on the Taliban leadership about two decades ago. The chances that such sanctions stay in place are still more so that the US can monitor the developing political situation in the country

and for the process of the evacuation of American citizens who remain in Kabul, as well as Afghans who have US and Western visas.

2.2.1 Afghanistan Foreign Policy since Taliban takeover2021

From being considered a pariah, the Taliban has gone through a process of socialization in the last ten years where it has been recognized as a party to the conflict in Afghanistan and has been acknowledged in various capitals of the world. Taliban has gradually focused on networking and is working to cut its reliance on Pakistan and gain recognition at the platform. These efforts were made possible by the opening of an office in Doha in the same year 2013. From 2018 direct talks between the US and the Taliban began in Qatar in Doha and had led to an agreement signed in February 2020 that provided the framework for intra-Afghan talks. Although the foreign policy of the Taliban is not established firmly yet, their stance regarding foreign policy, especially regarding a non-Afghan nation is highly contrasting to the stance of the Afghan government. Even in January 2021 when the peace talks were on hold, Taliban envoys to the negotiations visited Tehran, Moscow and other world capitals. Such an outreach by the Taliban did not arise as a shocker in the ten years that they have gone from having no relations with countries to being welcomed warmly with a lot of media coverage in several capitals notably within Afghanistan's region.(Aggarwal, 2016).

This policy provides a comprehensive look into the nature of the Taliban during their rule from 1996 to 2001 and maps out the transformation of their relations with other countries at present. Further it also examines the essential issues of foreign policy concern as they negotiate for peace with the government. Other than two decades ago, the Taliban was not in the additional meaning that they had legitimacy, recognition, and goodwill of the international community. By their deliberate attempts to rid themselves of dependency on others and to assert that their

rights/recognition should be implied, it can be seen that the Taliban governmental leadership has the capacity to learn and has been acting purposefully. Indications of this sort suggest that their foreign relations conduct over the last decade, or more, may also give us some hints regarding the manner in which they apprehend foreign policy in other wider fields. (Maley, 2000). The Taliban, in return, has not appeared to have offered anything in the likeness of a ‘white paper’ on foreign policy and there seems to be very little on how the group thinks about this issue in a definite manner. It is almost non-existent because there has been a very low worthy attempt at developing the program. However the author does not avail to me the current undertaken more comprehensive analysis of the problem.

Still, foreign policy has remained among the most crucial policy areas for the Taliban authorities and the Afghan government. And, this area was mentioned as the top one by both parties when in the final determination of the substantive issues of the round table negotiations in mid-December 2020. However, this is one area where potential great disparity in how foreign policy is perceived is quite apparent – an aspect that must be taken into account where any question of negotiations for peace is an option. Therefore, the realization that the identification of the foreign policy agenda of the Taliban is an explicit formulation is brought to the fore as a crucial task. From the above analysis, it is clear that the Taliban is fully respecting the foreign policy orientation toward the neutrality and the non-interference principle. This approach is associated with a historical precedent in which Afghanistan has navigated its relations through balancing the influence of neighbors, international powers, and a few strategic partnerships. Since Afghanistan post-2001, both as a player in the government and the international actors have perceived Afghanistan differently, with consideration of itself as a connector that connects a larger region which comprises Central Asia, South Asia and the Gulf as well. However, this

‘Heart-of-Asia’ vision only depicts a possible scenario in which Afghanistan can succeed; therefore, the existing disputes in the other regions besides Afghanistan are the things that make the breath of the country’s neighbors, including neighbors of Afghanistan, as well. (Harpviken, 2021).

From the Taliban point of view, such an occurrence is anomalous in some way. For instance, let us consider the Taliban which has unmasked an extreme interest in Turkmenistan, and the latter is known for its positive reception and recognition as one of the neutral states in the world. When it comes to the concept of the neutrality it will have a loop in the foreign relations between Afghanistan and the world’s superpowers. Before the Taliban, there were the last forty years of the history of Afghanistan violence; during that period, there was the occupation of the Soviet Union that was witnessed in the 1980s and then the war that began as a U.S.-led one, which has been in existence from 2001 to the present time. This makes them understand that avoiding being part of rivalry of power in the international system should be something important. Despite the fact that they cannot afford to ignore their own ambition, they still ought to try to hook up with market players. Armistice with the USA is such a deal, for many reasons in addition to military forces’ withdrawal from the country and North Korean regime recognition worldwide, it can also bring positively affect the chances of maintaining the economic aid from the US which is crucial while thinking for the future. One of the key components is that the Taliban are set on establishing relations with Russia as well as China has to be remembered.

2.2.2 Taliban’s Governance

The Taliban have taken over Kabul twenty months ago. Even though there is no more war, millions of Afghani people’s lives are not necessarily any happier. An acute humanitarian and human rights emergency is in Afghanistan, with millions of people’s lives and livelihoods at

risk. debate and embraced political participation, although it has been able to continue some governmental activities with the support of the UN. Now there are only a few very secretive leaders who want to eliminate any potential danger and eliminate women from public life, even if it means that the population of the country is getting poorer and the nation is getting more and more isolated from other countries. It is possible to attain only a certain level of improvement in governance and national stability without radical changes to this component of the system. The Taliban must be assessed on their governance experience as it seeks to woo other nations (Rahimi, 2023).

The Taliban have thus formed the ruling group of the country after taking control for two years as NATO and American soldiers withdraw from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. The opposition that can be put against the Taliban that would cause their collapse is not much. They have not split, as the leader that they follow has an unyielding ideology that has kept internal conflicts at bay. Nevertheless, it has been able to sustain a frail economy, not least through entering into investment negotiations with capital-surplus regional countries, even though the international world has not formally accord them recognition. They say that they fight against corruption and opium production, and have strengthened internal security measures by opposing armed organizations such as the Islamic State. Nevertheless, the Taliban has numerous restrictions regarding Afghan women and girls that prevailed in the second year of their rule. Within the span of a few months, they deprived them of parks, gyms, colleges, employment at nonprofit organizations, and the United Nations in order to punish them for not wearing the mandatory hijab, the Islamic headscarf, or for violating gender apartheid policies. These directives followed another that prohibited girls from schooling beyond the sixth grade during the first year of the Taliban regime. (BUTT, 2023).

2.2.3 Current and Potential Opposition

Despite the relatively fast Taliban's March 2021 triumph, a significant number of experts believe that the organization lacked popular support, but rather the absence of support for the previous regime. Many of the members of Afghan society, especially those living in urban areas, appear to have negative feelings towards the Taliban, including suspicion, fear or hostility and some small groups of Afghans have resorted to non-violent demonstrations to express their rights and opposition to the Taliban. The Taliban have always sought to silence such dissent, with the protesters in such demonstrations often being violently dispersed; two women's rights activists and their families were detained in September 2023. Regardless of the extent of the initial support, the Taliban government remains on a solid ground; the U. N. sanctions monitors report in June 2023 states that the Taliban are 'unfettered by any serious political opposition. (Al Jazeera, 2022).

The Taliban, two very distinct camps are instrumental in the forms of military opposition: on one end among the National Resistance Force (NRF), as parallel government to Afghan current government has been established. The representatives of the resistance at the transnational level have uncompromisingly called for the USA and the international community to intervene. They have also continued to maintain the representative offices in Washington DC. 27 No specific country has taken the stand at the international forum to support them, and it could as well be that the superior military might of the Taliban in the region and their good rapport with regional players must have had its role to play to bring former foes of the Taliban including Russia and Iran to accept the Taliban more of a peace option.

2.2.4 Condition of Economy in Taliban's Government

Following the Taliban's capture of Kabul, Afghanistan was subjected to a severe economic crisis, as the country's GDP fell between \$30 and \$35 billion. At present the country's economy is not in a free fall due to the cessation of fighting and the UN cash transfers. But the new structure of its economy has left virtually everyone in the country poor and over two-thirds of the people relying on international charity for their sustenance. Since the foreign money dried up, the urban middle class which was expanded by the international aid has been wiped out completely. Despite the decline in the economic indicators, the Taliban administration has been in a position to make some levels of budgetary provisions. Through exportation and government income, the mining sector has brought positive impacts. The Taliban also have their own religious taxes like zakat and ushr, which are collected by the ministry of agriculture for farmers; the amount collected through this tax is unknown as it does not go through the Ministry of Finance. Despite the fact that opium cultivation and drug trafficking is prohibited in Afghanistan, the Taliban's also collect taxes from this source. (Rahimi, 2023)

It is not difficult for the Taliban leadership to show you the funds it receives, but the extremists are still secretive about the money they spend. Proposed policies have been lacking and with the exception of a little budget that was made public shortly after the Taliban-group had regained power, sources of its funding and how they utilized the funds have been concealed. The government money as per the views to some of the commentators can be invested in the security industry and not social services. The best example that can be given from the World Bank poll held in 2022 is that retailers were using safer roads and reduced corruption levels; but they have some issues with penalties, ambiguous laws, higher taxes, and a declining number of customers. However, new directives coming from the current Taliban leader Hibatullah

Akhunzada, known as Amir al-Mu'minin with some orders Where the Taliban administration tried to prevent bribery, and unauthorized hiring practices, may actually may suggest an increase in corruption. There is evidence that the work market in Afghanistan is reduced dramatically, according to estimates by the ILO. Unemployment and reduction in wages continue to affect millions of people especially women thus substandard living standards and financial vulnerability continues among low income families. Harmful limitations of women's presence in public environment have negatively impacted female employees and female businesses, many women now have the only remaining relatively feasible employment opportunities for working from home. The flow of information in the service industry is also restricted; they are even using telecommunication for censorship and monitoring. A series of sanctions and monetary restrictions have taken the financial sector to a critical level or, at least, the failure is not complete. Currently, the Central Bank of the Taliban aims to eliminate liberal banking systems by implementing an Islamic financing system but no fixed time table and no set of rules have been decided yet. (Rahimi, 2023).

2.2.5 Afghanistan Relations with their neighboring Countries

Within the context of the neighborhood, the Taliban is as careful as the other nation should not allow them to rely too much on only one country. In the last decade, the Taliban has earnestly endeavored to diminish the influence that it otherwise enjoyed from Pakistan. Part of the Taliban group leadership and fighters are still in Pakistan and they depend on the state for their various needs. Therefore, the Taliban will attempt to gain the maximum amount of autonomy from Pakistan if it is deemed necessary. However, Pakistan is the neighboring country whose territory their forces cannot enter through therefore they will seek diplomatic real estate within this area. On the contrary, the case with India is somewhat different as it comes under

credit risk profile. While no direct diplomatic relations have been established between the Indian officials and the Taliban, Indian External Affairs Minister remotely attended the February 2020, signing of the US-Taliban deal which can be considered as the signing of the agreement between the US and the Taliban. It is remarkable how much the Taliban is isolated from the government: territorially through displacement and effects of the conflict that happens between the states in the South Asian region. Both are in a vulnerable position to be pulled to one or the other power in the inter-state conflict that is emerging as a defining feature of South Asia. In short, to be may difficult to say that we are neutral as a wealth but it will be more challenging to turn this into practical realizations. It is imperative to point out that the parties to the Afghan conflict will have a significant stake in the South Asia region, which might just slow things down. This could be due to the fact that there exist some form of relations between the Taliban and other countries that are surrounding Afghanistan. As with the case with Pakistan, the issue of water distribution between Afghanistan and Iran has also led to strains as well. Afghanistan's relationship to Iran, historically, is far from amicable: the two superpowers came close to war in 1988. In the past decades, the Taliban has not had any official relations with Iran at all, however, in the recent years, it has been reported that the Taliban leaders have visited Tehran several times. Notably, the Taliban in the past had a much better relationship with the Arabic states to the south. The UAE and the KSA formed a part of the countries that recognized the Taliban when it was in power with the 3rd one. But now the sympathy with the Taliban has become wiped out. On the other hand, the division is good sign of a balanced relationship for the Gulf rather than South Asia and the differences between the government and Taliban are not only seemed impossible to overcome. (Maley, 2000).

Of course, the soft neutrality also has implications for Afghanistan's military outlook: For instance, Iran has raised the most concern regarding the large number of international military forces in Afghanistan, which is a concern that all other countries in the region also have. However, a large Afghan security force – especially one connected to certain individuals in the region or other countries – would also be viewed skeptically by the neighbors of Afghanistan. The military forces of the Afghan government, the plans have been approximately 400,000 for the last ten years. For example, the future of its operation such as the procedure of reintegration and reintroduction of the fighters to the government and the Taliban is a problematic issue. This means that Afghanistan will not be in a position to pose any military threat to the neighbors; it will also give a new perspective on how the security sector will be incorporated into the peace process. Taliban is still preoccupied with Afghanistan, thus, it can be considered as a nationalist movement. However, it is linked with the Islamic movement, which implies that its purpose is to have the Islamic unity with the Palestinians, the Uighurs or with the Islamic minorities of the West or Russia. The issue of Uighur in China is something that the Taliban has never talked about which can be a good example to be discussed on this matter. The Taliban's reluctance to provoke Beijing's criticism and thus to some extent to Chinese ire places the Taliban in the same boat as almost all the states of Islamic civilization. This silence also indicates that the Islamic solidarity at large will not be the main factor that will define the contact between the Taliban and the Afghan government. At the end of the day the Taliban remains a state formation committed to the international system of states which of course is the antithesis of the transnational movements with which they have been associated particularly Al Qaeda. On the one hand, the Taliban and the Afghan government fundamentally differ in terms of the vision of Afghanistan's

foreign policy, but the desire of both parties to maintain the current system of states and the territorial integrity of Afghanistan forms the basis for cooperation. (Harpviken, 2021).

2.2.6 Human Rights of Afghanistan people since Taliban takeover 2021

Two years ago, the Taliban's were the ones ruling over the country of Afghanistan. Therefore, the policies they have exercised among the Afghani people have led to a consistent, systematic and horrifying violation of many human rights of the Afghani people such as their right to education, work and the freedoms of speech, assembly and association. That is why, the existence of numerous new reports on the summary executions and on the acts which are similar to the enforced disappearances, the widespread arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment, as well as arbitrary displacement, has caused new concern. The most vulnerable are women and girls, members of ethnic, religious, and other minorities, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons, sexual minorities and other marginalized groups, human rights defenders and other civil society activists, journalists and artists, educators, and political figures, and representatives of the former authorities and the security forces. While the Taliban de facto authorities have formally stated that the restrictions, especially in relation to education, would not be permanent, practice at the grassroots level has revealed a swift, organized, and comprehensive process of separation, exclusion, and persecution (United Nation, 2023). In comparison to the previous year the Taliban has raised the discrimination bar to a whole new level by making women and girls subjected to total domination. This discrimination has escalated to a point where it can be classified as a gender persecution, a crime against humanity; this has therefore necessitated the need to deliberate on the codification of what can be referred to as 'gender apartheid'. In December, the Taliban de facto authorities banned women from

working in NGOs and this April they barred them from working at the UN. (United Nation, 2023).

Now, it seems, the authorities that de facto, that are not official, in several provinces have recently issued directives to schools that girls above 10 years cannot study, though earlier the ban was at Grade 6. Women have even been barred from the so called ‘comfortable’ zones like beauty parlors that were mostly occupied by women since these have also been shut down. Many Afghan women and men, including numerous community leaders and teachers, have said loudly and clearly that they regret the fact that girls and women cannot continue their education. In general, the demands for a non-oligarchical form of governance have not been met; the members of the former government and military have not been granted amnesty; the laws that categorically prohibit torture and other forms of inhumane treatment of detainees are often violated; the minority groups continue to be underrepresented and discriminated despite the promises of integration and, lastly. The actual authorities have resorted to applying severe and humiliating punishments that include stoning, flogging, and burring alive under a wall, which are violations of international human rights. The assumption that there is a ‘reformed’ Taliban is now clearly an illusion.

You should begin the process of returning human rights to women and girls, that is, you should let women work and engage in business, and also ensure women are employed to provide services to women and girls, and you should also ensure all women and girls enjoy all the rights of human beings, including the right to engage in political and economic activities, and the right to vote and be elected, and you should also ensure women and girls have equal opportunities and

First of all the schools for girls and women and universities for all students should be reopened all over the world and the right to education which is the right to the quality and complete education should be fulfilled.

No more counterattacks on the previous government and security officials as well as the civil society members and fully embrace the number one priority – the declared general amnesty.

End the practice of arbitrary detentions which is as good as enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment including in judicially-sanctioned forms of punishment and thereby allow human rights watchdogs and humanitarian bodies unfettered access to all detention centers and monitor them.

The actions that have led to the reductions of the civic space will be restated followed by an assurance that the civil society organisations, journalists and other media workers can work without any form of restrictions and the expansion of the civic space will be made again.

The measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination against the ethnic and the religious minority, and the support to be provided to them on the issues of decision-making, should be implemented. (United Nation, 2023).

Afghanistan's economy is near collapse, the sources of income for the poor families were destroyed, more cases of drought like situations and other climate related shocks were created which put the social, economic and cultural rights of Afghans at risk and thus a higher demand for humanitarian assistance was indicated. It is estimated that there are about 16 million children who are not receiving the adequate nutrition and the health care that is required for them in Afghanistan. With the current economic recession, there are negative practices that are experienced including forced and child marriage, abuse through economic and sexual

exploitation, selling of children and body organs, forced and child labor, trafficking, and unsafe migration. The expulsion of Afghan female aid workers has also impacted on the effectiveness of the humanitarian intervention. (United Nation, 2023).

While the humanitarian and human rights situation has been deteriorating for the past two years, the UN is now reporting “over \$200 million in funding gaps for humanitarian operations.” These may lead to halting of community-based classes, reduced food aid, and shutting down of health facilities, among others. Moreover, the not so good conditions, once again a plethora of restrictions and a scarcity of employment opportunities can lead to negative ways of addressing issues such as associating with the criminals or the armed groups. It is alarming to note that many Afghans are still relying on this as their last resort. (United Nation, 2023).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter “Afghanistan since the Taliban Takeover 2021” concludes the discussion of the past and present difficulties of the country with the focus on the new phase of the Taliban’s rule. Many of the assurances that some of the Taliban leaders gave before for a moderate form of rule have turned into repression of liberties, particularly women’s and minorities’ rights, and the strict adherence to Sharia. This situation has not changed; in fact, the country is facing sanctions, isolation, and a severe humanitarian crisis, which affected millions of its citizens. On regional and international level Afghanistan has been changed due to these geopolitics where Afghan neighboring countries, other countries and powerful actors of the world have used different political measures and policies to deal with Taliban regime. However, some attempts of recognition, though they were scarce and vague, have not facilitated acceptance of the Taliban regime that has negative outcomes in terms of prolonging the process of attaining stability in the country. Internally, the Taliban is under a lot of pressure: problems, challenges include

maintaining unity within the group, keeping the internal security from groups like ISIS-K, and dealing with the increasing discontent from the population regarding the Taliban's rule. The future of Afghanistan thus is uncertain and how the people of Afghanistan are going to endure this kind of suffering still remains a glimmer of hope for the poor souls of the nation. Thus, it is understood that while the Taliban's regime in 2021 has changed the political landscape in Afghanistan, there are numerous obstacles on the way to sustainable peace, stability, and development for Afghanistan that will require time and joint efforts of Afghanistan and other countries.

CHAPTER THREE

CHINA'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN: THE POST US PERIOD

3.1 Introduction

The other nations are United Kingdom, United States of America, and Russia and these three nations have at some point in time overruled in Afghanistan affairs and even fought proxy wars against each other, and however, China has not had such experience. Unlike before the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, China had vested interests in Afghanistan for the last few decades only in managing the explosion of the jihadi trend in Afghanistan among the Uyghur separatists of Xinjiang. China is also a neighbour of Afghanistan and the two countries share a border of approximately 75 Kilometers with the North Eastern Afghan province of Badakhshan in Central Asia bordering Xinjiang. Technically China has never been a direct player in the great game in Afghanistan, primarily because Afghanistan until recently has never been particularly high on China's diplomatic radar and from a strategic standpoint, China was never quite prepared to get into the great game. (Zhao, 2013).

Although the level of trade and investment between China and Afghanistan can be considered low, in the past three decades, both have been gradually rising. The exports of the Chinese towards Afghanistan increased from nineteen million to fifty million US Dollars. I can report that global expenses for IPEs ranged from \$91 million to \$704 million between the years 2002 and 2010. 3. Also, China has invested \$4 through its two state-owned enterprises Meta&Co, MCC and Jiangxi Copper Corporation Ltd, JCCL. 4 billion in Afghanistan since 2007, thus indicating the increasing trend of violence in the country. It is located in the province of Sare

Poleh in the Mes Aynak district and contains about 240mt of indicated and inferred copper reject with a grade of 2%. 3 percent. The biggest foreign investment in Afghanistan till now is the Chinese copper mining venture, Aynak in Logar. As of now, the largest FDI is in the copper extraction, Logar Aynak by China. They understood that they can gain the strategic advantages over others by not putting their bet on the big game in Afghanistan. From the inception of the Kabul Interim Administration under President Hamid Karzai to the Ghani presidency until the fall of the Afghan government in August 2021, Washington and European nations accepted the security and state-building responsibilities in Afghanistan whereas China escalated its trade and investment assets. (United Nation, 2023).

It is important to state that China has not aligned itself with the Taliban on one side, or the Afghanistan government under President Ashraf Ghani even though the latter has financial deals with Beijing. Looking back at this, it could be viewed as the right action since it allowed China to maintain a friendly stance of the Taliban leadership which was rather beneficial. Furthermore, from the fiscal year of 2017-18, as the USA withdrawn from Afghanistan and military presence in the region of around Afghanistan, China gradually rises up the proportions in military aspect. (Stephen, 2019).

Despite such a condition, China does not agree with the idea of having at least two Chinese sponsored military bases the first in Murghab region and the second one in Gorno-Badakhshan province of Tajikistan. To prevent influence of certain radical religious militancy from Afghanistan which has unstable Politics situation that might impact China's Sinkiang province, and to provide security assurance to Tajikistan among others. This makes a strategic sense because the Central Asian countries including Tajikistan are an essential part participating in the one belt one road project, OBOR, and such region is a legitimate concern to China due to

impacts on safety and security. Barnes according to S. G satellites China has consistently stayed in the background in Afghanistan, but when Obama is heard saying that US forces will disengage from Afghanistan gradually in 2011, they started to gear up for a higher level of operation in Afghanistan.(Zaef, 2010).

China cannot afford any kind of political unrest or an extended civil war in Afghanistan because this will complicate the situation in Afghanistan significantly and lead to further complications in the region. Thus, China has vested interest in Afghanistan stability as this country is a door to the Eurasia region. Afghanistan is located in the middle of two major economic silk roads of China, namely the China_Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which links Pakistan and Central Asia. These are some unaccepted facts to understand the importance of stability and peace in Afghanistan for the security of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) At the end of December, 2014 the NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will transfer its last mandates for Afghanistan's security to local authority. In Afghanistan, a small but major NATO, US security preparation and support will remain active; however, over a decade of Western-led direct effort to develop solidity and security in the country would fade significantly. Western countries are not, however, the only ones with an interest and a stake in Afghanistan's security, and other countries of the region must be included in the discussion if there is to be any hope of confronting the problem of international insecurity. (Malik, 2002).

Chinese authorities have for a long time feared the export of extremism from Afghanistan and its neighboring states, including those in the Central Asian region to its own territory, particularly its far-western province of Xinjiang. This area is also inhabited by ten million Uyghur, a Turkic ethnic group mainly composed of Sunni Muslims. That is why the actions of the Western countries that are now reducing their military presence in Afghanistan can

raise questions in China's mind. This period, therefore, marks a defining era in how China is likely to engage with its neighbour Afghanistan. China remained a low-key security player and has provided little security to Afghanistan since 2001. The senior partner in this strategic love affair has pledged a mere \$250 million in reconstruction aid to Afghanistan.(Zhao, 2012).

China maintained its diplomatic relations with the first Taliban government between 1996 and 2001 mainly with a view to getting security guarantees against the ETIM which in the 1990s had even attempted to establish an Independent Uighur State in the Xinjiang province of China. Thus, the ETIM having been driven from Xinjiang in 1997 established this base in Afghanistan in 1998 with the backing of the native Taliban regime. Although offered a safe refuge to the group, founded by Mullah Omar, the original leader of the Taliban, it is claimed that he personally assured China that Afghanistan under the new regime would not permit any organization to operate from its soil to launch operations against China.(Zaeef, 2010).

China and the Taliban regime did not have diplomatic relations but Chinese officials and academics visited the capital Kabul and met with their counterparts to discuss various issues such as Chinese humanitarian assistance to support the restoration of direct flights between Kabul and Urumqi as well as assistance to repair damaged power networks. From the media reports, China firms Huawei, ZTE are in the Afghan telecommunication network while the guns and replacement parts are transported through Pak. Also, the government wanted China to support the removal of UN Security Council embargo on arms trade with Afghanistan. (Malik, 2002).

In December 2001 after the fall of the Taliban government the Chinese government recognised the Afghan Transitional Administration under Hamid Karzai. In December 2002, the six neighboring countries of Afghanistan, in recognition of the principles of bilateral cooperation,

non-interference in the internal affairs of the other country, and mutual respect of territorial integrity, signed the Kabul Declaration on Good-neighborly Relations with the Karzai government. When addressing issues pertaining to Afghanistan, China emphasized several principles that should be adhered to: They include: (a) recognition of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity; (b) any solution that may be found for the Afghan problem must come from within the affected society and not be imposed on it; and (c) the government that is formed in Afghanistan must include as many factions as possible, or as few as is viable, but must be broadly based. The bilateral agreement that can be mentioned is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighborly Relations signed between China and Afghanistan in 2006. (Zhao, 2012).

China was not very active in Afghan politics over the next decade, although it sought ways to engage with it, including massive but unsuccessful business expansion attempts there. The Chinese authorities also worried about the activity of ethnic Uighur separatists in Afghan territory. On the contrary, interactions between the Uighur militants and the Taliban intensified through their cooperation on the frontlines, against the Western and Afghan government security forces. The ETIM, also called the Turkish Islamic Party (TIP), was especially troubling to China. It was incorporated into the western anti-terrorism strategies in the frame of the "war on terrorism" after the UN Security Council listed it as a terrorist organization and a affiliate of Al Qaeda in 2002. The US and NATO military in Afghanistan controlled the threat of the ETIM/TIP on behalf of China, even though the latter constantly accused the former of this. (Kley, 2014). China increased security cooperation with the Afghan government to plug the security vacuum created by Obama's announcement of the US's plans to pull out of Afghanistan by December 2014.

In 2016, during a visit to Kabul a Chinese military delegation offered more than 70 million USD in military assistance to Afghanistan where General Fang Fenghui – the then Chief of the General Staff of the People’s Liberation Army. In July of the same year the Chinese side supplied small arms and military vehicle spare parts to the Afghan security forces. Even as China maintained public appearances of its traditional policy of non-interventionism in the affairs of other nations, these activities could be described as ‘creative’ foreign security engagements. Apart from bilateral diplomacy, China proactively initiated new models for political and security talks: a trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan foreign ministers and the Quadrilateral Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism with Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan for counter-terrorism cooperation in 2016. China’s main efforts, nevertheless, were in the economic field which was as follows; A 30 year mining concession in Mes Aynak, a site 40 km southeast of Kabul, was awarded in 2008 to Jiangxi Copper and the China Metallurgical Group Corporation, which is thought to be the second largest copper deposit in the world is located in Logar province. (Kley, 2014).

Another important activity included the signing of a memorandum in 2011 regarding the Chinese-Afghan oil cooperation in the Amu Darya oil basin concerning the China National Petroleum Corporation which is a state owned business. Afghanistan has a huge amount of mineral resources which can potentially make it one of the richest countries in the world due to deposits of oil and natural gas and substantial amounts of copper, iron ore, lithium and rare earths worth at least \$1 trillion. (Seltmann, 2012).

But, neither of them has reached implementation phase because of numerous technical barriers like absence of proper infrastructure and security problems etc. China, however, was not as active in humanitarian aid and development during this period as it conducted significantly

fewer activities. The Chinese model of development aid in Afghanistan has mainly consisted of the utilization of large-scale infrastructure projects in the developing nations that reflect the PRC's strategic and commercial interests. Structurally, however, Afghanistan is not a part of China's BRI and, as mentioned earlier, sustained security rivalries have prevented the proposed Chinese projects from materializing. However, the following table presents what can be regarded as Chinese ODA. In 2002 it promised \$150 million for helping Karzai's interim government to be formed over a five years period. Over the next two decades, it offered a variety of assistance including grants, goods and materials, debt relief, training for ability and support to the governmental and educational system but the value of this was very little compared to other donors. China committed 1.4 billion yuan (\$197 million) in the 2002–13 period to Afghanistan.(Li, 2021).

For the 2014–17 period, when China was more involved in peace processes because of its role as a negotiation facilitator, an additional \$326.7 million was pledged. However, this was only two percent of the seventeen billion US dollars of ODA that Afghanistan received in the three years of that time. China has been reaping the benefits of American nation building in Afghanistan for years while the United States allowed China to focus solely on its strictly (geo) economical goals(Rakisits, 2021).However, once the United States withdraws from the country, and the Taliban regain power, Afghanistan could be a breeding ground for terrorists, which would have an effect beyond the country's borders. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the PRC, including Xi Jinping, often emphasize the need to combat the so-called 'three evils' – radicalism, terrorism, and separatism. This rhetoric is said to be linked to armed separatist movement in China's own Xinjiang region. Apart from security consideration there are individual economic gains that China stands to benefit in the region. Being a country with the estimated worth of 1

trillion US dollars, Afghanistan is believed to be very much endowed with minerals such as copper, cobalt, iron, mercury, and lithium among others. Majority of them are still unused. Moreover, the nation relies heavily on external support, \$14.3 billion or 39.6% of its 2018 GDP as estimated by the World Bank.(Rakisits, 2021). Due to the need of looking for other sources of funding, Beijing has the opportunity of taking part in the development and mining of natural resources.

In addition, as an extension to the current China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Beijing might integrate another corridor into the existing network of ports, railroads, pipelines, roads and power grids under the framework of the “One Belt, One Road Initiative.” A prerequisite is an Afghanistan that is politically stable and has a government in Kabul willing to turn a blind eye to the opium business or at least not actively combat it regardless of whether the whole country is run by the Taliban or just partially.

China and the Taliban have had talks before this. As the reports of the previous year showed, China offered to help rebuild the destroyed infrastructure in Afghanistan by sending money to the organisation through Pakistan, which is China’s closest ally in the region. Beijing should engage with regional actors, including the Taliban, and use its conditional support to gain leverage over their compliance with Beijing’s agenda. Indeed, China will likely attempt to alter the group’s outlook on Xinjiang when it demands the organization sever all ties with other militant separatist organisations within the Uighur people, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. Consequently, the spokesman of the Taliban Political Office in Qatar in early July stated that the group recognizes China as a friendly country and that Afghanistan will not allow any more Uighur separatists from China to seek refuge in the country. Taliban delegation visited China on 28 July for the discussion of issues related to security and the process of peace and

reconciliation.(Rakisits, 2021). As per Beijing’s perspective that the Taliban are expected to have an important role in the ‘peaceful reconciliation and reconstruction process in Afghanistan’, the statement of the Chinese foreign minister might have enhanced the diplomatic recognition of the terrorist group.

3.1.1 China's involvement and influence under the current Taliban government

The Chinese government had been having diplomatic relations with the successive Afghan governments since 2001 but it has never severed ties with the Taliban. However, this communication only intensified after the Obama administration announced a date of withdrawal of US army from the country in 2014. In that very year China assigned its first ever special envoy for Afghanistan and the country spearheaded in negotiating the political affairs between the Taliban and the Afghan government. China was a member of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group with the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and has been involved in the Moscow Dialogue, formed in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Moreover, between 2014 and 2019, China itself allowed the Taliban to use its territory for the organization of several meetings. (Li, 2021).

The purpose of these endeavours was to support the formation of ‘a broad, national and Afghan-led and -owned reconciliation process among the many political factions constituting the country’. China’s participation and sponsorship also ensured China would be able to engage with the leaders of the Taliban and whoever else turned up as the government. While the Chinese delegation invited nine Taliban leaders to a conference in Tianjin in July 2021, one month before the Taliban’s takeover, the head of the Afghan Taliban Political Commission represented the group. During the meeting, China’s foreign minister Wang Yi referred to the Taliban as “a crucial military and political power in the country and a major player in the Afghanistan peace,

reconciliation, and reconstruction process.” In August, shortly before the Afghan republic collapsed, a spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked what Beijing would mean in a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan: “We are ready to continue to develop good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan. “While some speculated that it was this desire to expand its influence in the region, it was likely a reflection of the Chinese government, whose primary interests in Afghanistan are positive, if not friendly relations. (Rakisits, 2021).

3.1.2 China's presence and security interests

Since security can be linked to internal security in the westernmost part of Xinjiang, the Chinese have remained convinced that security is the most significant factor in their interactions with the Taliban. The Taliban assured Wang, the foreign minister during the virtual conference held in Tianjin in June 2021, that the group would not allow any forces to “do anything bad to China in Afghanistan’s territory. The same promises that the Taliban had made to China in the early nineties were being repeated here. Security has therefore remained a focal area of concern in the diplomatic relations between China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Afghan Taliban since the latter’s assumption of power. China also has its limitations in counterterrorism when it comes to Afghanistan. Since 2020, the USA has de-listed the ETIM as a terrorist organisation and its international counter-terrorism operations have not been as brutal as in the previous years. Hence, the Taliban is now the one that China mostly depends on to fulfill its security needs. In fact, any security presence on Afghan territory would be highly limited because of China’s policy of non-interference in the affairs of Afghanistan, which, Wang Yi has reiterated during his visit to Afghanistan in May of 2022, asserting that China will “not interfere in Afghanistan’s domestic affairs”. As for the extent to which Afghanistan directly threatens China through the

ETIM/TIP, there are different viewpoints. There is a UN study that suggests the group is a small organization, with only a few hundred members, which the Taliban has already relocated from the bordering Badakhshan region to other parts of the country in what appears to be an effort to rein in the group's activities against China. (United Nations, 2022).

The straight border is less than 100 kilometers long, and it located in the Wakhan Corridor, which is quite isolated and only traversable during the warmer months. Also, the Chinese side of it is quite backed up. So far, there has been no record of direct hostility against Chinese citizens which can be associated with the activity of ETIM/TIP in Afghanistan. Chinese concerns, however, also entail the fact that the terrorist and militant groups could turn Afghanistan into the base for recruiting, planning, and spreading propaganda. These concerns may then be transmitted to other countries in Central and South Asia where there is a significantly larger Chinese presence and investment. Such concerns are further compounded by a series of brutal attacks targeting Chinese nationals in Pakistan. It is noteworthy that in recent years, the propaganda and campaigning activity of the Uighur groups has been less compared to other years which can be attributed to the attempt of the Taliban to curb the activities of the group. Meanwhile, China's strategy remains sustainable only if the Taliban continues to see tangible and potential benefits from the relationship in terms of trade, aid, and politics. It also depends on consistency and continuity of the Taliban's own China policy and on the extent to which the Taliban is able to keep control over sufficient parts of the country and exert sufficient influence over the various other non-Taliban extreme Islamist actors to be able to fulfil the guarantees it provided to its Chinese counterparts. (Tiezzi, 2021).

China's influence is already checks and balances. The Taliban has not exported Uighur terrorists from Afghanistan to China including Abdul Haq al Turkistani, the commander of TIP.

As per the UN assessment made in June 2022, the new leadership seems to be offering unprecedented level of liberty to the terrorists including ETIM/TIP and other. This was also true for al-Qaeda and its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri who continued to be harbored in Afghanistan until a US drone strike that targeted him in August 2022; contrary to the Taliban's assurance in the 2020 Doha Accords. China also has general insecurity which is also recognized by other countries in the international community. The conflict-related security incidents in Afghanistan reduced significantly by first half of 2022 from over 2000 to 12000 occurrences in the same period of the year 2021. However, the Afghanistan nation remains one of the most unstable nations to this date. Encompasses cycles of attacks and acts of terror, as well as a number of militant groups that may be aligned with or in opposition to the present administration. Despite the fact that the ETIM/TIP has pledged allegiance to the Taliban, there are other violent anti-Taliban terrorist groups in the security landscape that are in competition with the Taliban. Currently, in Afghanistan, there are thousands of fighters in the ISIL-Khorasan group, formerly known as ISIL-IA. ISIL-K has also been effective in recruiting those who have had a difference with the Taliban on issues of ideology, politics and even ethnicity; a case in point being a large number of Uighur militants who have defected to ISIL-K. While the main goals of the Taliban are domestic, ISIL-K has declared China in its list of territories it wants to expand to and is openly hostile towards China and its actions in Xinjiang. (Webber, 2022).

Further, ISIL-K has claimed responsibility for terrorist attacks on the diplomatic compounds in Kabul. Taliban's internal legitimacy is therefore at risk due to how much it bends to cater to Chinese security than radical militant Islamist factions. China does, however, have more influence in Afghanistan due to the alliances that China has made with some of the other countries in the region. For instance, it has established a long-term operational relationship with

Pakistani intelligence and security agencies. The Pakistan authorities have been supporting the Afghan Taliban as their official patrons although the bilateral relations have somewhat strained due to the disputes over the borders and the Taliban's providing shelter to the Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistani terrorist organization. An existing post which China and Tajikistan signed to secure the Tajik-Afghan border has been complemented with financial support from China's Ministry of Public Security for another post on Tajik soil. There are also claims of Chinese training presence in Afghanistan, despite these claims they have not been confirmed. Therefore, while China's security involvement might not yet be growing directly in Afghanistan, there might be a growth in China's security influence in the region.

3.1.3 China's economic interest in Afghanistan

China's strategic interests in Afghanistan are partly predicated on the sustainability of the sweeteners China can offer to a country that is the third least developed country globally in terms of human and social capital. The country was struggling with poverty before the Taliban seized power in August 2021, and the situation has only worsened. A completely unprecedented economic, financial, and humanitarian crisis has emerged following the breakdown of the economy that was almost entirely dependent on foreign assistance and the freezing of Afghan foreign assets in the amount of over \$9 billion, among other factors. China has not been very active in the Afghan consumer market, but during the past few years it has offered several economic incentives to Afghanistan, including reducing tariffs by 98% and starting to issue visas to Afghani businessmen in the recent period. Talks on Mes Aynak copper and Amu Darya oil projects are still ongoing after Chinese business delegation and executives' trips. But the talks have never gone beyond this level. The restrictions, which the US imposed after the Taliban takeover, put short-term constraints on large-scale investments, however, several barriers also

exist to hinder the chances of these projects turning into a reality in the medium term.(Rakisits, 2021). However, beyond these discussions, no improvement has been made. The large-scale investments are limited by the sanctions imposed by the United States after the take-over of the Taliban, however there are other factors that makes these opportunities even more limited for the completion of these initiatives in the near future.

Apart from security issues that are always on the foreground, extraction projects are facing the lack of the infrastructure, particularly transport facilities. China considers Afghanistan as its neighboring country and is comparable in size and has a strategic importance for the development of infrastructure in the region, but Chinese firms understand the risks associated with trying to develop it. While it is still uncertain how much these state-owned firms would participate, the meeting held in Tunxi, the statement made by the foreign minister Wang Yi after the meeting and his visit to Kabul are apparent indications to any Chinese majors who might be interested in investing in Afghanistan that political support for the firms has been secured..(Wang, 2022).

This is evident since Chinese concerns place a lot of emphasis on economic aspects. China already controls a majority of the market in the rare earth minerals. It has more than 85% of total rare earths and about 30% of global rare earth reserves. China does not feel the urgency to go out and buy new supplies for the simple reason that the value of imports of rare earth materials was \$8 billion in 2018, a drop in the bucket when compared to the over \$1 trillion of imports of oil. While the ability to control the use of rare earths provides China with a tool to put pressure on the international level, it is one of those things that Beijing has found out that it does not have much use in trying to do. After a conflict in the political arena, China tried to cut off the supplies to Japan, which was not successful as Tokyo was able to look for other sources of

supply and therefore, decrease on the reliance on Beijing. Likewise, as per the reports which came up last November, Chinese miners were on the brink of being provided with an access to Afghanistan's large lithium deposits. But large companies do not have a need to get through the difficulties of Afghanistan. Certain unscrupulous mineral ore middlemen may enter the picture, such as small miners or small-scale mining companies that will utilize pumps and excavators to obtain the brine lithium that could be extracted from dried salt lakes. (Pantucci, 2022).

Last, concerning the weaknesses in economic management, corruption, and the rule of law, Afghanistan was already ranked among the least hospitable investment climates internationally before the Taliban seized power. It led to the closure of the institutions that had been seemingly functioning particularly in the banking system. The problem that faces future Chinese investments on a larger scale is where to invest money to get the best results in a more equitable and sustainable manner. From August 2021, several limited economic activities like steel making and trading of precious metals have been done or resumed by the Chinese people and organizations from both the public and private sectors. (LAN, 2022).

In April 2022, the Taliban again approved the industrial park investment project of 216 million dollars by the Chinese company in the outskirts of Kabul city which is planned to accommodate 150 factories. Future outlooks involve expansion in the export and import of agricultural products, which comprises 60-80 percent of the livelihood of the people of Afghanistan. In this regard, the "pine nut corridor" China's attempt in January 2022 to airlift 1500 tonnes of Afghan pine nuts has been eye-opening. China has also expressed desire to help in search for the alternative crops that can be used in place of opium the only product which Afghanistan presently export most of its value.(Wang, 2022).

Overall, China's economic activity is significantly more diverse and widespread across Central and South Asia. Pakistan is home to one of the largest flagship projects of BRI called China Pakistan Economic Corridor in its first phase which is more than \$25 billion in investment in ports, transportation, power, agriculture and water management, industrial zones and special economic zones and other investment projects either implemented or ongoing. Chinese diplomats have reportedly discussed with Afghan and Pakistani officials that they would like to involve Afghanistan in CPEC. But, there are various challenges that are already affecting CPEC, like security concerns like attacks on Chinese investors and individuals and less investment for projects that have been planned. While China has been promoting economic integration and affording Afghanistan membership in larger regional frameworks for investment, trade, and transit, more connections and cross-border traffic and people and goods may create security concerns. (LAN, 2022).

3.1.4 China's Developmental Interests and Presence

In addition to the aforementioned smaller-scale investment projects and the current negotiations on large-scale investment projects that are unlikely to materialize in the short term future, Chinese involvement in the country could be characterized as developmental involvement since August 2021. A meeting of members of many essential ministries of China and the temporary government of the Taliban was organized in December 2021 to discuss the working group on humanitarian aid and economic rebuilding. Unlike western and other multilateral donors which often use aid instrumentally to support or promote political, governance or even economic reform, China has not traditionally done so. UN and western developmental presence has been pulled back since August 2021 in a bid to pressure the Taliban to change on issues such as gender equality and political representation among others. These attempts have not been

successful so far. Notably, China has also stressed that the Taliban should be more representative than it is at the moment. The Chinese authorities, unlike the American ones, pay considerably less attention to the question of establishing rules to regulate bin Laden's activity; they focus on non-interference and the specific situation of the Afghan people. The purpose of the December 2021 conference was: to promote the export of high value agricultural products such as pomegranate, saffron and pine nuts from Afghanistan to China; to offer support and technical assistance. The growth of the private sector is the result of establishing the Afghan producers and local companies with ideas and projects such as the pine nut corridor.

The above initiatives are in accordance with the general Chinese approach to foreign aid, which is characterized by a stronger focus on the business aspect of cooperation. It has to be seen whether such projects are viable in terms of sustainable economic growth and development or developmental impact. Indeed, China's overall ODA presence in Afghanistan has been relatively minor in the past few decades, and given the current situation in Afghanistan and the general diplomatic challenge of formal aid to a government that is not officially recognized, one cannot expect that the Chinese ODA to Afghanistan will surpass other donors in the near future. Notably, bearing in mind that the war has spanned for two decades and the circumstances under which the Afghan parties left the negotiation table, there are individuals in China who argue that USA and NATO member nations should remain fully accountable for assisting Afghan reconstruction. (LAN, 2022).

In another note worthy event, the very next day the Taliban announced formation of an interim government, China pledged \$31 million for emergency aid. Three million doses of the Covid-19 vaccination and food were part of the relief assistance package. While the Taliban has shown their warm welcome to the Chinese support, this is a far cry from the UN's offer of about \$4

billion to support humanitarian aid in Afghanistan in 2022. Notably, the United States of America remains the most generous humanitarian aid donor to Afghanistan and has delivered more than \$1. According to the study, it reached \$ 1 billion in the year following the Taliban's takeover. US aid following the earthquake that struck southeast Afghanistan and killed hundreds of people was far more extensive than China's emergency contribution of \$7. 5 million. There are no indications to date that China is willing to step into the role of the leader of the development partners. The following aspects are also important: Chinese development and humanitarian assistance to an Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban has not been channeled through the multilateral mechanisms of the UN, such as the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, or any other UN organization. (UN Office, 2022).

Instead, China has prioritized assistance in the bi- and mini-lateral forms to assist in the development of the nations. One of the examples of such strategy is the Tunxin Initiative, initiated in April, 2022 with the surrounding governments of Afghanistan. This is in line with the nature of China's foreign aid policies and trends that have been characterized by bilateral arrangements and its relatively more regional diplomacy of peace and development in the context of Afghanistan. It also illustrates how China is advancing its security interests, and that requires more raw economic power. To the extent that assistance is being delivered through the Taliban, there are issues in terms of effectiveness and transparency with regards to the distribution of goods and funds. However, the Chinese projects are smaller in scale business-like projects could be much more useful in a country where large amounts of aid have led to the massive fraud, waste, and corruption. (Arlington, 2021).

China Town in central Kabul is not like China Towns that are found in other parts of the world. These are ten-story structures and the inhabitants are textile merchants, steel traders, and deal

makers. While there are no many rows of noodle homes over here, the roof is equipped with Chinese solar panels for electricity. China Town had entered into an agreement with the Afghan government to develop a small 300MW coal-fired power plant to stop rolling blackouts before the Taliban advanced across the Afghan countryside to take Kabul. That deal like many others signed by a small but a persistent group of investors is now caught between the new Taliban leaders and the fleeing Afghan governments. But many of Chinatown's residents are deciding to stay put in the capital of Afghanistan while other diplomats and soldiers around the world prepare to leave. (Bagshaw, 2021).

3.2 Diplomatic Engagements

Afghanistan has a flexible and rational approach to diplomacy in China. China has maintained official relations with the Taliban, the Afghan government, and other stakeholders, in addition to other Afghan factions. China has been interacting with the Taliban and has called on them to embrace peace and engage in political processes. China has also has tried to enhance its diplomatic and economic ties with the Afghan government in a bid to promote stability and development. Beijing has also utilized its influence in regional mechanisms, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), to promote engagement between Afghanistan and other actors in the region.

3.2.1 Future prospects

In the future, China's involvement in Afghanistan is probably going to change in reaction to the country's internal changes and evolving geopolitical landscape. It is anticipated that Beijing would persist in giving precedence to stability and economic advancement, utilizing its financial means and diplomatic clout to influence Afghanistan's course. Notwithstanding, several obstacles

still exist, such as the possibility of violence intensifying, political instability, and rivalry with other foreign entities striving for sway over Afghanistan. China will need to strike a careful balance between diplomacy, pragmatism, and strategic insight in order to navigate these complications. (Xinhua, 2022).

China emerges as a key player in navigating Afghanistan's post-US terrain, exerting considerable influence and influencing the nation's future course through a variety of strategies. The complex dynamics of China's strategic participation in Afghanistan have been examined throughout this chapter, including its strategic goals, diplomatic ploys, economic investments, regional dynamics, and future possibilities. China's larger regional aspirations and security imperatives are intricately linked to its strategic interests in Afghanistan. According to Zhang Li, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, maintaining peace in Afghanistan is essential to China's national security strategy, not just as a regional issue but also in preventing the spread of terrorism and extremism into its Xinjiang province. (Li, 2023).

Afghanistan's importance as the centerpiece of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) further demonstrates Beijing's dedication to promoting connectivity and enlarging economic channels throughout Eurasia. (Xinhua, 2022).

China's diplomatic strategy has been practical and inclusive, interacting with a wide range of Afghan parties and using its clout in regional forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Beijing aims to advance a political settlement that takes into account the interests of all parties concerned by continuing talks with the Taliban and backing the Afghan government. Hu Shisheng, the director of the China Institutes of Contemporary International

Relations' Institute of South Asian Studies, noted that China's involvement in Afghanistan demonstrates its dedication to peaceful diplomacy and conflict resolution. (Hu, 2021).

China has made several economic investments in Afghanistan, ranging from resource exploitation to the construction of infrastructure. Chinese enterprises have been actively engaged in initiatives to support Afghanistan's telecommunications, energy, and transportation networks. Furthermore, Chinese companies looking to get essential commodities have a lot of options because to Afghanistan's rich natural resources. (Reuters, 2023).

China's involvement in Afghanistan is in line with its larger regional goal of promoting stability and cooperation in Central and South Asia. Beijing aims to handle shared issues and advance regional development by strengthening relations with nearby nations including Pakistan, Russia, and the republics of Central Asia. (Global Times, 2023).

To sum up, China's post-US strategic involvement in Afghanistan is a result of a convergence of economic objectives, security considerations, and regional diplomacy. Beijing's position as a major player will remain crucial in determining Afghanistan's future direction as it navigates a time of transition and uncertainty. China has the potential to positively influence peace, security, and development in Afghanistan and the surrounding area by pragmatically and strategically managing these challenges.

3.2.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, China's role in Afghanistan during the post-US period epitomizes its evolving foreign policy approach, characterized by pragmatism, strategic foresight, and a delicate balance between economic interests and regional stability imperatives. As the United States withdrew its military presence, Afghanistan entered a new phase of uncertainty, marked

by political fragmentation, security challenges, and economic vulnerabilities. In response, China has strategically positioned itself as a crucial stakeholder, leveraging its economic clout through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to foster infrastructure development and regional connectivity. China's engagement in Afghanistan is driven by a complex interplay of interests. On one hand, it seeks to mitigate security risks emanating from Afghanistan, particularly concerning issues of terrorism and separatism that could potentially destabilize its western region of Xinjiang. On the other hand, Afghanistan presents significant economic opportunities, from its vast mineral resources to its potential as a key node in China's ambitious trade routes linking Asia with Europe.

Diplomatically, China has pursued a nuanced approach, engaging with various Afghan factions while maintaining relations with neighboring countries and global powers. Its hosting of dialogue initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) demonstrates its commitment to facilitating peace talks and promoting stability in Afghanistan through diplomatic channels. Looking ahead, China's role in Afghanistan will likely continue to evolve, shaped by the interplay of internal Afghan dynamics, regional geopolitics, and global strategic interests. The success of China's initiatives in Afghanistan hinges on its ability to navigate the complexities of local politics, build trust among diverse Afghan stakeholders, and effectively balance its economic investments with security considerations.

In essence, China's engagement in Afghanistan underscores its emergence as a major player in shaping the region's future, navigating challenges with a blend of economic pragmatism and diplomatic acumen.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

4.1 Introduction

As the world was struggling to contain the corona virus outbreak, the United States of America and the Afghan Taliban penned down an ‘Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan’ on 29th February 2020 in Doha. According to the conditions laid down in it, both the USA and its allies will have to pull out all martial forces no later than 14 months of signing of the treaty. (DoS, 2020)

The USA has also committed to facilitate intra-Afghan negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan authorities (which were launched only on September 12) and to obtain a nod from the United Nations to the treaty. In exchange, the Taliban have ensured that Afghanistan will not harbor threats against the USA and its friends. Such leader formations as the UN, NATO, EU, China, Russia, and many other capitals have welcomed the agreement. In its arrival the agreement heralds hope and also the lamentable consequence of fear. The criticism arises on the back of many factors that include a long-standing war, a fragile Afghan state adversely comprised on various lines, other international players’ opposing motives and various other contentious matters that make those critics skeptical about stability in the Afghanistan. They fear that the war-torn country will again turn into the state of chaos like what happened when the Soviet occupation ended in 1989 with an immediate troop pull-out. The void created in this relation was occupied by the Taliban, parts of Al Qaeda, and other terrorist organisations of the international nature in the following two decades. On the other hand, cautious optimists argue that the agreement itself showed a change in the rigid stands of various parties involved: The

Taliban veered from the choice to force their extreme view through force; the USA on understanding that its attempt as a superpower to control Afghanistan failed; Pakistan knowing its history interfering Afghanistan affairs concluded that they could not dictate terms; the US as well as the Kabul-authorities accepted Taliban originating from Afghanistan's largest Pashtun tribe as a factor. (Mashal, 2020)

This shall be actualized through the implementation of the peace agreement under which there will be a finite withdrawal of the American troops. On 08 October 2020, the president of America Mr. Donald Trump disclosed that he wants to bring all his Country forces in Afghanistan home before Christmas. While some NATO allies have certain reservations within this regard, in case Trump's administration really goes ahead, the number of the U.S. troops will drop to zero, bringing an end to the long 19-year War on Terror (WoT). (Graham-Harrison & Borger, 2020).

Thirdly, based on Afghan dislike for intruders or occupiers, the war will lose one of its major obstructions and the two warring factions may agree to an amicable solution to a seemingly unending conflict. Despite the fact that both China and Pakistan were not a signatory to the peace agreement, they worked hard towards negotiating the peace deal. Might be they are not so decisive for this large deal to occur – at least in this phase. They played significant roles in advancing the diplomacy as powered ahead in the triumph of the major challenges in the process of the peace. For instance, Pakistan pressured the Taliban to settle for peace talks while China spared Islamabad-Kabul and Kabul-Taliban relations deadlocks. The central issue, which essentially defines the role of Afghanistan in the context of the BRI and the CPEC, is the aforementioned necessity of the political stability of Afghanistan for the purposes of ensuring the stability of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the PRC. Apart from security issues, which are

of much significance to Afghanistan, China is interested in Afghanistan's enormous deposits of natural resources, and as a fast-emerging superpower, aspires to exert greater influence over the future of its troubled neighbor to its best advantage. In order to achieve these objectives, China shifted its Afghan policy paradigm which had been characterized by non-interference to one that was already interventionist. As for Pakistan, main interests include acknowledgement of Durand Line with Afghanistan as the international border, limitation of India's impact and hostile to Pakistan groups in that state, and possession of the access to Central Asian Republics (CARs).

It may be noted that the Sino-Pakistan cooperation on Afghanistan has been relatively new in its operationalization, although its roots can be traced back to earlier periods, and has come into focus more recently in the form of a geographic diversification and new phase in their relationship. All this cooperation takes place within the context of their overall, strategic partnership, which is based on trust. The two countries have claim support for each other's interests and have buried the hatchet in the areas of divergences by adjusting their respective policies. Both China and Pakistan are also involved with other states and are engaged in various processes regarding Afghan peace process but, their bilateral relations seem more fruitful in the larger interest of both the countries and Afghan peace process than any other procedure. Despite the importance of the given topic, still there are no many studies conducted in this field. There is a wealth of literature in micro and macro which describes more specifically the role played by Pakistan and by China. Thus, the books except for a few pieces, contain valuable information and ideas about the different cultures and societies as well as their own culture, which could have helped them enhance their understanding and embrace various values and norms prevalent in those societies. (Boni, 2020).

It is well known that China and Pakistan have had a strategic partnership of a long time standing. The nature of this relationship remained restricted mainly to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and other South Asian countries, which were focused their security threats from India. Economy, defence and security and recently on Afghanistan are few areas where two countries have increased their cooperation recently. Most conspicuously this cooperation is not a new age story and Afghanistan remains a unique country where in the past Sino-Pakistan policies conflicting with each other. While the Pakistan provided support to the anti-state actors of the region like the Taliban and the Haqqani Network, the China considered these and the other religious militant groups as posing threats to the stability of Xinjiang and the larger region. Despite the fact that the basic policies of China and Pakistan match each other well, this does not mean that there will be no problems in the future. Again, history which renders the Afghan territory as the ‘Graveyard of Empires,’ debunked all strategic and military calculations of global powers.

Great Britain could not have thought that their long adventure in Afghanistan During the nineteenth century the former Soviet Union could also least expect that their campaign in Afghanistan during the 1980s would turn into long-drawn un-win-able war, similarly, the US could also have least expected this while they launched the WoT. Therefore, Afghanistan will be a challenging reference point for Sino-Pakistani relations. This article will also contribute to the advancement of the ‘(rise of) China debate. The new Beijing’s position suggesting active participation in Afghan affairs has departed significantly from centuries of indifference. This change, along with other recent trends in shifting of China’s foreign policy such as start of its first ever overseas military base at Djibouti, playing an increasing role in United Nations’ Peacekeeping Mission, and the setting up of mercenary forces of its own to protect its overseas

interests are clear indications of its desire to become a Great Power. An evaluation of growing Chinese involvement in the afghan setting will therefore offer food for thought to China analysts. However, the opportunity still remains the article will contribute to the discussion about the Afghan peace process – the subject that was and still is of critical significance for the international security during decades. (Kumar, 2011).

4.2 China's Key Interest in Afghanistan

Despite the fact that the PRC “(People Republic of China’s) has a static border of 76 kilometers with Afghanistan, it has paid a low political attention to Afghanistan historically. After 9/11, the USA established its military presence in Afghanistan and CARs thus becoming China’s next door neighbor. Yet, China continued to steer clear of getting entangled in Afghan affairs and refused to take part in the WoT. (Andersen & Jiang, 2018).

China realized the importance of establishing relations with Afghanistan in around 2010 and it further intensified the relationship in the subsequent years. Public information available shows that in 2012, the member of the Politburo Standing Committee, Zhou Yongkang, paid a visit to Kabul. This was the first time when the head of the state of China was paying a visit to Afghanistan after more than four decades that is 1966. India had hosted a conference in June 2012, which was known as Istanbul Process or Heart of Asia for peace Agreement between the Afghan government and Taliban in October 2014, China had hosted a conference in Beijing. It may also be noted that this was the first time that any meeting on Afghanistan was held in china. (Hirono, 2019).

‘ Such stance, the Chinese government has persisted in its role as the third-party arbitrager of the disputing parties bilaterally and multilaterally. ’ After the Istanbul Process, it was the first

time that China invited the Taliban delegation to participate in it. Furthermore, during the peace and reconciliation talks signed in Doha, the Taliban representatives have made several trips to China. Therefore, the apparent strategic interests of China in the Afghan context can be summarized in the following three broad areas. First, by religious extremism spreading from Afghanistan, which was an intrusion into China's vital concern. It could affect regions of the Xinjiang type and provoke secessionist sentiment. Though, the problem with Xinjiang had its earlier roots in history with ethnic aspects, the occurrence of the pan-Islamic tendencies in the area intensified them. The losses Soviet incurred while fighting Afghanistan in 1980s, formation of CARs on ethno-religious bases in 1991, and Taliban's rule in Afghanistan in mid 1990s led to separatist movements in Xinjiang. While China continues to clamp down on terror promoters domestically and coordinate efforts with other nations in the region, particularly under SCO membership, secessionist sentiments and occasional acts of terror persisted. (Swanstrom & Tucker, 2019).

The Urumqi violence on July 5, 2009, in which over 190 people were killed, was one of the most severe events in decades. Still more hazardous for Beijing in particular was the fact that while terrorist activities had primarily been contained to Xinjiang province they started appearing in other municipalities. Suicide bombings occurred in Beijing and Guangzhou in late 2013 and earlier 2014 respectively while multiple attacks happened in the hour city of Kunming in December 2014. At this time, it came to the fore that the Obama Administration was going to significantly draw down the troop's number which, in turn, increased China's concern over the reemergence of violence and militancy in Afghanistan after the US departure. (Scobell, 2015).

In addition, displacement due to terror related situations in Afghanistan poses a threat to the implementation of BRI. Amongst the six BRI economic corridors in the making, two areas

are near to Afghanistan; these are the China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor; and CPEC. Afghanistan has also seen good amount of investment from china in its neighbor's countries. For instance, Iran where recently China unveiled its plans to invest over US\$400 billion over a span of next twenty five years. (Staff, 2020).

This indicates a growing Chinese interest in Iran and its foreign policy in the Middle East. Perhaps, it is due to the fact that the Iran has vast energy resources, strategic location and regional assignation in geopolitics that makes Iran an important component of China's strategic plan in the region. Beijing had provided its contribution to The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action more commonly referred as 'Iran nuclear deal' although, the Trump Administration pulled out of it in March 2018. On the other hand, China agreed to purchase Iranian oil and gas, supported the continuation of Iran nuclear deal, opposed Indian membership to the CPEC, and recognized Iran's concerns over the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Lately due to the increasing pressure from the United States, Iran is slowly inching towards the Chinese side. This is just one example of the fundamental flaws in the arguments and reasoning of those who are opposed to the government's strategy and planning. Investment in the entire region is on the Rise as our friend China has realized. Indeed, the volatility that originates from Afghanistan does extend to the south. . (Umarov, 2017).

Beijing frets that instability in Afghanistan could prove disastrous for its projects, such as OBOR's key projects in Central Asia. In doing so, the further destabilization of Afghanistan and the export of chaos and violent conflicts from the territory of this state to other countries, including those of South SCR and SE, and regions potentially threatens OBOR and China's investments in it. Although Afghanistan has nothing to do with these countries, which are considered friendly to China in general, it also does not pose a negligible threat to the realization

of Beijing's vision. In this context, the PRC has no other options but engaging itself in Afghanistan's foreign policy to a larger extent. Chinese analysts concluded that the continued civil war in Afghanistan had sabotaged Xinjiang's stability and posed challenges towards the execution and advancement of BRI. In an effort to address these concerns, China decided that an active involvement in Afghan affair was optimal. Second, resources were another magnet that attracted China, owing to the presence of large, and untapped natural resources in Afghanistan. The US Geological Survey, the US agency that determines mineral resources, estimated that Afghanistan had up to US\$ 1 trillion worth of minerals. Aforementioned, Afghanistan's Minister of Mines, Wahidullah Shahrani, took the bar even higher and estimated the total worth of the Afghan natural resources to be US\$3 trillion. (Hatef & Luqiu, 2018, Hong, 2013).

4.2.1 Pakistan Relations with Afghanistan

In order to analyze Pakistan's role and stake in Afghanistan, it is necessary to analyze the main points of the history of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the main issues on which they may have divergent views. Pakistan and Afghanistan are alike two neighbors who disputed their border which is approximately 2600-kilometre long. The border drawn unilaterally as before is famously known as the Durand Line which was demarcation in 1893 by Mortimer Durand the secretary for the Indian foreign affair and the Afghan ruler Abdur Rahman Khan. Later Afghan governments again criticized the demarcation arguing that it was drawn unfairly and that it placed the Pashtuns on two sides of the border eternally, and was made by the British on a submissive Afghan ruler. When the Indian Subcontinent was partitioned, the British authorities were not ready to accept Afghan government's assertion for the redrawing of Durand Line. In the middle of this wars and conflicts, when Pakistan was carving out its existence in the world map and becoming independent in August 1947, Afghanistan only one country which was

against the membership of Pakistan in the UN. After that point, the Duran Line remains to be uncertain and brought some stains in their bilateral relation, however, no Afghan government accepted it in international level. Despite being a relatively Pakistan-friendly 512 G. ALI regime of the Taliban (1996–2001), it never recognized it. The border dispute lay at the center of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations and created a number of complicated issues. The absence of the cohesive plan on border control between Pakistan and Afghanistan provided the opportunity for militants and criminals along with organized groups, chased out of the official territories. In subsequent years some of the other members of the transnational terror group like Al Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and IS also came into play. The fact that the majority of terrorist organizations threatening these countries such as the Uyghur separatists in China, the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Pakistan all simply exploited the lack of control in the border regions. This together with the consecutive attitudes of Pakistani governments toward the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) contributed to the area’s lack of development socially and politically, inequality and grudge. FATA was out of legal framework of Pakistan until 2018 when it became part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa therefore the administration of the area had a traditional approach. Despite the fact that it was performed after 9/11 incident and with an intention to eliminate terrorism, US strikes by drones and Pakistan military operations in FATA areas led to the development of resentment amongst the people of FATA. Such frustrations turned into the political party known as Pashtun Tahafuz Movement or PTM and which won two seats in national legislative body and is against operation against tribes. Therefore it can be seen that although the situation in the tribal areas is not very grave still it causes concern among Pakistani authorities. Last but equally important from the Pakistan’s security viewpoint, new tension emerged between Pakistan and Afghanistan

to the benefit of India in Afghanistan and this indeed expanded the sphere of conflict between the two countries up to the western front of Pakistan. This essay believes that India has been influential in Afghanistan with very brief interruption during the 1980s when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and when Taliban was in power 1996-2001. Entries in the 'post 9-11 Afghanistan,' as US military action dislodged the Taliban, India returned and formed a new strategic partnership for which it invested \$3 billion in economic as well as military aid. India has trained Afghan security personnel, provided small arms and attack helicopters besides signing the agreement on Strategic Partnership (2011) and has dispatched paramilitary forces for 'protection' of Indian citizens and projects français. (Verma, 2020).

Islamabad alleged that India used its presence in Afghanistan for creating instability in Baluchistan and supported to the TTP in a bid to encircle it from both side (Hanauer & Chalk, 2012).

To these assertions, New Delhi provided a strong negative response and considered it a fair and rightful move to further develop relations with Kabul. This backdrop shaped Pakistan's Afghan policy which strived for three objectives: We shall also seek formal acceptance of the Durand Line as a geopolitical border with Afghanistan, in order to avert the activities of 'hostile-to-Pakistan' entities on Afghan territory and to establish transit-links with the CARs. To realize these goals, Pakistani policy makers endeavored to put in place friendly governments in Kabul. (Gregory, 2014).

Islamabad support to the Taliban and the Haqqani network was a part of this Policy. From the defense perspective, Pakistan wanted to establish strategic depth in case of any confrontation against India in Afghanistan. The policies previously outlined did not only prove

ineffective but they also contributed to enmity in the region. Analyzing all these factors such as external pressure, the bad image that has developed about Pakistan, terrorism having a massive effect on economy and society and China's persuasion and pressure on Pakistan to change makes one to understand the reason for Pakistan to change Afghan policy. 1 Pakistan started realizing that there cannot be peace in Afghanistan if there is not to be one in the country itself. It began to emerge in the Pakistani strategic elites' self-reflection during the 2010s and fully manifested itself in the form of what is widely referred to as the 'Bajwa Doctrine'. (Warraich, 2018).

Unveiled by Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the Doctrine was about laying down the strategy of Pakistan for shifting the strategic geometry for peace in Pakistan as well in the region. With the perceived change of guard in Pakistan's political structure with Imran Khan assuming office as the Prime Minister in August 2018, the contours of the Afghan policy have undergone a marked change. Mr. Khan Mehsud has major concern for peace in Afghanistan and he stressed that it is directly related with peace in Pakistan. His government ceased providing assistance and focuses on one group over the other they rejected the notion of the strategic depth and supported the international diplomacy for the 'Afghanist led and Afghanist owned' reconciliation. In the words of Tehran Times (2018) 'Imran Khan's administration was far worst than the previous Govt as per used to say that under Imran Khan, relation between Islamabad and Kabul have improved'. Khan has recently come out in the media to again express desire to end the 'enmity' and establish communication with the Afghan government. The US, Kabul authorities, and other stakeholders acknowledged the change in Pakistan's policies (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

Perhaps, for the first time in several years, the USA ceased shifting the responsibility onto Islamabad for the dual role as the counterterrorism and the supporter of the Taliban

simultaneously. It also effectively ceased demanding for ‘do more’ and also recognised Pakistan’s efforts in counterterrorism. (Jeffery, 2020).

President Trump who had responded to Pakistan with threats and frustration in his first years of presidency but has recently described the relationship thus, ‘We are doing very well’. Indeed, I can mention that if there has ever been friendship with Pakistan we are friends with them right now. (Gul, 2020).

US officials acknowledged about the improvement in US–Pakistan relations and the change in Pakistan’s Afghan policy on several occasions. The following part explains how China and Pakistan implemented their joint strategies in Afghanistan.

4.2.2 China’s Role in Afghanistan and its Implication on Pakistan

Again Afghan land was liberated from the external influence after the flat pull out of American troops in August, 2021; but the country plunged into severe economic, security and a human crisis. Afghanistan is subjected to very severe restricted measures by the United States and deed of all foreign assets including gold and oil reserves as well as other foreign reserves of Afghanistan amounting to US\$ 9 billion of its central bank. The international community has been urged to release Afghan assets as requested by countries such as China, Russia and Pakistan given that the country is at risk of falling into deeper more severe humanitarian challenges. But despite the above noted provisions of the western law, the western approach is still punitive to Afghanistan. However, in light of these afghan crises, there are regional countries such as China and Pakistan fulfilling its normal diplomatic relations with the afghan government. Thus, Beijing wants to enhance relations with Kabul on different levels for raising the security and general condition in the region. Nevertheless, China is not willing to set foot in a warzone that is

Afghanistan without a friend in this case Pakistan to help ease the tension. In this regard, China has done and is doing something with the help of Pakistan and this is that, though Afghanistan is diplomatically isolated and not recognized, it is trying to give it economic aid. (Butt, 2023)

The recent development is the inclusion of Afghanistan in BRI via CPEC. China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan had signed a tripartite deal in May 2023 to work together on the numerous strategic projects intended to be launched by China. There is a project on construction of Trans Afghan railway passing through Uzbekistan up to Gawader port in Pakistan that would further enhance the transit linkages between both countries. Other Chinese ventures in Afghanistan covers areas such as infrastructure development and oil exploration. Having examined the given issue, it can be stated that in January a Chinese company concluded a contract on the receipt of oil in the framework of the Amu Darya oil field. In mining projects, China, has shown interest in mining copper from Mes Aynak; the second-largest copper mine globally and lithium that is in excess in Afghanistan. To some extent the natural resources that are available in Afghanistan can be of benefit to China's economic system since China's economy is resource dependent. China has long term investment plans as it is economically active at so many levels; for example it had recently opened an air corridor to import more of agricultural produce. Also, China has granted Most Favored Nation status to Afghanistan and put 98% of Afghan goods into its country tax free. Chinese initiatives exhibit its economic, strategic, and security interests in Afghanistan. Both China and Pakistan wanted to extend CPEC into Afghanistan for a long time but security issues, political instability and the presence of the USA in the region made it difficult for China and Pakistan to pursue their interests in the region. However, China wants to stabilize the region to promote its economic initiatives and to connect its trade routes with the rest of the world by using Afghanistan as it is a landlocked country that

can connect China and Pakistan to Central Asian states and Europe. Apart from the economic initiatives, China has security concerns in Afghanistan as well. (Butt, 2023).

This manner, the Chinese presence in Afghanistan can bear certain advantages and a number of attainable disadvantages for Pakistan. It is going to take time to come up with the projects of inaugurated by China; meanwhile, Pakistan is pinning it as a positive economic opportunity for the country as well as the friendly relations with Afghanistan. History also springs the fact that Pakistan has very keen interest in Afghan situation because it is directly affected. Thus, the Chinese influence in Afghanistan will prove to be a meaningful factor in Pakistan in future as well. There is undoubtedly room for the transit trade routes of Pakistan to improve where one way is to further expand CPEC into Afghanistan which will enhance the connectivity throughout the region. China has extended its military and humanitarian supplies to Afghanistan with cooperation of Pakistan during the critical periods which limits china's diplomatic engagement in the region. This means that the influence of the USA has been declined to a significant degree in Afghanistan since the present Taliban government is giving more importance to relations with China. Pakistanis also facilitating the establishment of better relations between the two countries to counter-state threats from NCA such as TTP and other terrorists which are also beneficial for China. Another important factor is that China is extending cooperation for counter-terrorism measures with Pakistan and Afghanistan which in turn would help the nations to enhance the domestic security situation. Pakistan needs to deal with the security threats that affect the country and needs help from China that can bolster its position in the region. Thus, there is a similar space for bilateral relations' improvement in the context of the partnership between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China. (Butt, 2023).

Contrarily, Pakistan and CPEC may worse suffer if Afghanistan is unable to address the security issues of China. CPEC's project is going to be challenged by the circumstances in the Afghan state and it can become problematic for Pakistan and eventually affect its relations with Beijing. Pakistan cannot afford to pay this price since it is economically dependent on china and also receives regional support. The outstanding bilateral relationships between the two neighboring countries in stressed may also not be beneficial for the project of CPEC. Afghanistan, always has to be careful when it comes to dealing with Pakistan as a mediator between China and Afghanistan. China's concerns also must be met in order for both countries to have better relations regarding their economical status and security. Since the future dynamics of the diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and China hinges on the outcome of the aforementioned situation, Pakistan will need to address the outcome correspondingly. It also means that if the relations between China and Afghanistan become friendly sometime in the future, Pakistan stands to benefit over and above from such a deal.

4.2.3 China's Role in Afghanistan and its Implications on Iran

US troops pull-out in Afghanistan in August 2021 therefore signified a paradigm shift in the region, and more so for surrounding states like Iran. China, which has had a low-profile approach to Afghanistan for decades, has in recent years provided the country with more attention and support.

4.2.4 Implications for Iran

Different era of Iranian-Afghanistan relationship but always sensitive and it has been affected by regional politics. Currently, China has emerged as an interested party geomters in the

ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and the region after the withdrawal of the US forces from the country. China's increased involvement in Afghanistan could have several implications for Iran.

4.2.5 Economic Implications

4.3 Increased Competition and Collaboration

The BRI has a strategic focus on improving transport links as well as growing trade between China and different countries in Asia and Afghanistan as a crucial part of this plan. Afghanistan is considered to be as a vital link to the Central Asia by one of the BRI major stakeholders – Iran. As China becomes more invested in Afghanistan's infrastructure, Iran is set to not only gain more access to a country that has long been closed in terms of investments on physical infrastructure but also see growing competition. For example, Iran might be effectively aided by enhanced infrastructure and communication with other countries in the region to make major improvements to trade. But, it can also come under pressure to challenge China for control over the Afghan markets or resources.

4.3.1 Impact on trade route

Iran's latest breakthrough is Chabahar port which has been under construction with an Indian investment; it is designed to offer a trade route to Afghanistan that does not pass through Pakistan. The establishment of CPEC, especially the investments in the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, gives rise to a competitive structure. If China has preference over Gwadar over Chabahar this can lead to the reduction of the strategic and economic value of the investment that Iran has made. However, mechanization of these two ports under the Iran & China common banner may prove beneficial in strengthening the region's trade links.

4.3.2 Political and Diplomatic Implications

4.4.1 Shift in Regional Power Dynamics

The shift in the power relations of the region occurs with the change of guard in Afghanistan when China began to cooperate with the Taliban. Iran and the Taliban have had a history of hostility with periodic efforts at rapprochement, meaning that Iran needs to walk a thin line. On the one hand, Iran and China would both benefit from a stabilized Afghanistan due to their geographical proximities; however, the perceptions differ in implementation tactics and affiliations. Iran has lesser influence though it is related to Afghanistan through cultural and religious interaction with the Hazara community and other Shia factions while china's strategy is more economic and security).

4.4.2 Influence over Afghan Policies

Iran might need to follow China's example whereby the People's Republic focuses on pragmatic engagement with the Taliban through proposing more economic relations and stability. The worries that China's model of engagement may be effective will surely make Iran think of its strategies in Afghanistan to fit into the Chinese stipulations nicely. It could mean trying to get to a diplomatic agreement, or emulating the same economic policies to keep its interest in Afghan affairs.

4.5 Security Implications

4.5.1 Counterterrorism and Border security

Iran and China share mutual concerns about the future roles of Afghanistan and both countries would prefer not to see Afghanistan as a hub for extremists. On Chinese side, the paramount challenge is the ETIM which is a threat to China's Xinjiang region. It is therefore

perceived to contain elements of extremism and revolt with potential to spill over to Iran's territory. One can surmise that shared intelligence gathering and reinforcement of their borders could be the possible outcomes of the deepened relations between China and Iran. However, potential misunderstandings, for instance, in the way both sides plan to address the Taliban and other militants may cause complications.

4.5.2 Refugee Crisis and Humantrain Concern

The situation in Afghanistan to remain unstable for a long period has caused a large number of refugees to enter Iran where millions of Afghan refugees have already been residing. Indirectly Iran could be affected by China's role in realizing stability of Afghanistan in the sense that the measure might help decrease the refugee issue. On the other hand, if such attempts of China are not fruitful enough for achieving this stability then Iran may still go on suffering from Humanitarian and economic pressures due to ongoing Refugee movements.

4.5.3 Strategic Implications

4.5.4 Energy and Resource Politics

Unique types of earths or RRE's of Afghanistan are of interest to Chinese investors due to the unexplored minerals of Afghanistan. Embed I Therefore, Iran, an oil and gas-rich country, could align with China in the development and exploitation of Afghan resources through cooperation in joint business ventures. However, they might also compete for these resources and this might put a strain on their relationship especially where the interests do not conform to each other. While natural resource sharing and energy related projects could advantageously be conducted between the two nations if efforts are made to handle the process diplomatically.

4.6 Regional Alliances and Rivalries

Iran and China along with SCO have the chances that their policies affiliated to Afghanistan may be coordinated and aligned within the SCO framework. Its cooperation might enhance the stability of the area which would in turn check other poles such as the US. However, it is within the context of differing national interests and from outside pressure that could challenge this fellowship. Iran and China, with their partners from the region reaching consensus on the 25-Year Cooperation Program launched in 2021, should form a coordinated approach in Afghanistan.

As China emerges as a major power in post-US Afghanistan, Iran faces an ambiguous situation wherein both benefits and obstacles are noticeable. More avenues for connectivity could lead to increased economic development for Iran but its regional investments compete with China. Politically, Iran has to manage relations with Taliban and adjust to China's pragmatic approach. Potentially security-seeking interest could promote cooperation between Iran and China while ideological trenches still exist. Tactically it is possible that both countries may utilise their strengths and allies in the region for their own benefit but despite such co-operations there will always be competition between the two. As the dynamics of the situation continue to shift, Iran's policies will need to be properly managed to secure its position against the incoming threat posed by China.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Since the Taliban seized an Afghanistan devoid of its foreign peoples, anticipations have been rife that China would have a new opportunity to seize the geopolitical, security, and economic opportunities left by the West. China can be seen to have direct stakes in a peaceful, ent synonymous with development and good governance, Afghanistan that can help avoid the cross border troubles creeping into the Xinjiang province or acts of terror against Chinese citizens and properties in other parts of the Central South Asian regions. To date, there has been no signal that China would be willing to commit any human and material resources to address the entire spectrum of security, economical and development issues that Afghanistan confronts – much less two billion dollars. 3trillions which the USA expended in two decades of operation in the country. Given its non-interference policy and learning from both Soviet and US failure in Afghanistan, it is unlikely that China would risk becoming militarily mired in the country. Although the defense of human rights in international relations can be partly explained by the five reasons mentioned above, two more factors could also have contributed to the noninterference policy. First, despite the increasingly important role of China as an actor in the economic and security spheres of Central Asia, Afghanistan still holds a relatively marginal place in its foreign policy priorities, which remain focused on the region of East Asia and the competition with the USA. Second, the Chinese government still feels relatively secure about the possibility of the ETIM/TIP or any other militant groups more generally to pose a direct threat to China and its facilities in Xinjiang and the region at large for at least two reasons: First, the Chinese government can rely on the support and cooperation of other regional players such as

Pakistan or Tajikistan to counteract this perceived threat, and Second, the militants can, for various reasons.(Li, 2021).

China has not been actively partisan over the Taliban but, at present, its strategies in Afghanistan involve stabilizing post-war relations. China has so to some extent accepted the sovereignty of its regime, has supported the lodging of Afghan money and has offered only some non-lethal aid. To my mind, what is most important is that it has not ruled out the possibility of future huge investments in the country's economy – an opportunity which the Taliban authorities welcome. In return for these commitments, the Taliban has at least offered some level of assurances on security issues that are important to Chinese internal security. In practical terms China has not been very active in Afghanistan and even in the future it appears unlikely that it will engage in direct intervention to protect its interests. However, its actual influence has been relatively modest in comparison to its security provided. The possibilities of making deals and bringing the radical shift of investment such as in the mineral resources of Afghanistan remain a hum and are not likely to come into existence for quite some time in future when certainty and security can be provided to the international investors. This looks rather improbable, especially when Afghanistan's government keeps on being politically ostracized and financially buffered. Last but not the least, Chinese development and humanitarian help remains and is likely to remain grossly inadequate and that too minimal in scale compared to what the USA has continued to give after its withdrawal. China is more involved in the region's dynamics as the country has actively engaged and initiated various forms of multilateral processes, some among which have yielded positive outcomes in the area of humanitarian aid. In this respect, Afghanistan may also present China a further opportunity for growing its leadership and by collaborating with other neighbors in order to have a positive impact for a longer-lasting, more

regional approach to peace, security and development. For all the newcomers' unprecedented concessions, it is only right to remember that it has been only one year of the Taliban rule; and while China still performs a balancing and pragmatic policy – the future drastic transformations are yet to come. Ground or international events that have emerged new indications may prompt modification to this approach in as yet undiscovered ways.

Largest number of foreign troops have now left Afghanistan which has shifted a new geo-political reality in the region and China seems ready to act. China has multiple investments in Afghanistan and security concerns due to its Belt and Road Initiative, the issue of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and its regional agenda which leads it to be considered a significant actor in post-U. S. Afghanistan. This thesis has aimed at demonstrating the complex effects of China's involvement in Afghanistan in the region, especially concerning Pakistan and Iran. For China, Afghanistan is more or less a transit country where it sees the maintenance of stability as a means of grooming the country for a symbolic role in the realization of BRI in the Eurasian region. Transportation and communication infrastructures, as well as energy corridors such as the roads, railways, and pipelines promote trade and investment that help bring about security for populations within the region. Most notably, the country possesses vast mineral wealth, which are valuable assets for China, thus making it imperative for the later to be actively involved in Afghanistan.

However, it is crucial to note that China could also face some challenges as it gets involved in Afghanistan. The security situation is still a concern, Taliban rises back to power and the groups of agents that are still active in the country create instabilities. Understanding China's apprehension of the exporting of extremism and terrorism to its soil, especially in Xinjiang,

China's approach must remain a gentle and a balanced one. This has put China into political relations with the Taliban in search of guarantees of stability as well as cooperation and partnership in counter-terrorism. Potential and adverse impacts of Sino-Afghan relations There are many possibilities and risks for Pakistan with ever-increasing Chinese engagement in Afghanistan. Pakistan needs better infrastructural connectivity and hence would benefit economically in the backdrop of the BRI. Pakistan's relation with Afghanistan might be improved that would make Afghanistan a transit hub for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). However, Pakistan has to thoroughly manage security issues; any instability in Afghanistan on the other side of the border, is likely to affect the internal security situation.

Iran, on the other hand, sees China in Afghanistan in light of driving a strategic competitor –the United States –out of the region and in its bid to advance its regional power projection. Many investments and the infrastructural projects that China is willing to commit in compliment the Iranian's desire for a powerful regional impact and an integrated economic zone. Nonetheless, Iran has concerns over the coming influence of the resurgent Taliban and the possibility of sectarian tension. The dynamics of Iran's relationship with the Taliban and how these ties will evolve will be shaped through China's diplomatic relations with both sides.

Therefore, the paper holds that China has a vital role to play in post-U. Afghanistan is both a continuous and latent process that has many of its developments resonating throughout the area. Actual China's strategic, economical and conception security intentions will define its participation, which will substantially influence regional environment. Of course, the results of this engagement will depend on careful orchestration of diplomacy and softer power with a combination of economic investment coupled with security cooperation. This paper posits that

for Pakistan and Iran, China's strategic presence necessitates both opportunities and threats identification and management.

FINDINGS

Strategic Engagement and Economic Initiatives

China's infrastructure and mining investments in Afghanistan aim to promote regional stability and integrate Afghanistan into China's economic sphere.

Security Concerns and Counterterrorism

China focuses on counterterrorism to prevent extremism from spreading to Xinjiang, thereby boosting regional security.

Diplomatic and Political Influence

China engages in diplomatic efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, increasing its political influence and acting as a regional mediator.

Impact on Regional Dynamics

Pakistan: Views China's role as beneficial for its strategic interests, enhancing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and countering Indian influence.

Iran: Sees China's involvement with cautious optimism, recognizing both competition and potential for collaboration.

Economic and Humanitarian Considerations

Chinese investments and humanitarian aid are expected to boost Afghanistan's economy and create jobs, supporting long-term development and stability.

Challenges and Limitations

Security issues and Afghanistan's fragmented political landscape pose significant challenges to China's goals, and its non-interventionist policy may limit its impact.

Long-term Geopolitical Implications

China's increased role in Afghanistan marks a shift in regional power dynamics, influencing the US-China rivalry and the strategic calculations of regional powers like Russia and India.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Regional Cooperation

China should work towards promoting the regional integration format, which involves Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and other neighboring nations. This can be done through such avenues as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO, whose primary aim is to foster security and economic dialogues as well as cooperation on issues of terrorism among others.

Economic Investments and Infrastructure Development

As for Afghanistan, China must assert sustainable and inclusive economic interests and prefer investments in infrastructure with a positive impact on the Afghan population and able to foster their connection with the rest of the Central Asian region. It is vital that projects under the BRI must be implemented diligently and maintain transparency, promote environmental awareness, and act responsibly.

Diplomatic Engagement and Mediation

China should use its diplomatic power to diplomatically intervene in Afghanistan and arbitrate between several groups in the country. Promoting political culture that engulfs all the ethnic and religious groups in the country and ensure their political rights this can go a long way into solving the problem.

Humanitarian Assistance and Development

China should bring more focus on the humanitarian assistance and development cooperation with Afghanistan to address the emergency requirements that include food security, health and schooling. The sh.100 billion per diem fund development objective should be in line

with the long-term development programs that enhance the country's fiscal capacity to address structural weaknesses among the society.

Balancing Relations with Regional Powers

The Chinese leadership should be sensitive to regional realities vis-à-vis Pakistan and Iran, and where their strategic necessities and apprehensions lie. This means that devouring is an important step in preventing tensions that may culminate in war and ensuring that conflict resolution is achieved through regional dialogue.

Monitoring and Adapting to Changing Dynamics

It is necessary for China to pay close attention to the changes in Afghanistan and the overall situations within the region with intent on re-strategizing on the go. Thus, volatility, variation, adaptability, and sensitivity to changes will be the key factors in the effective risk management and in the identification of opportunities.

Promoting Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges

China needs to open up all sorts of cultural communication and people contact with Afghanistan and its neighbors. Educational programs, cultural initiatives and student exchanges will contribute to improved understanding among people of the two Regions and the creation of good will, which is the most important foundation for long term stability of the Region.

Environmental and Resource Management

China should make sure that the economic involvement to Afghanistan respects the conservation quality and sustainable utilization of resources. It is now important that the Afghan natural resources and environment be preserved to enhance stability of the country.

Engaging with International Organizations

China must join with other nations or international organization such as UN, World Bank and IMF in order to foster and plan for the Afghan future. Cohesiveness with these institutions can help augment outcomes of developments and stabilizations. Thus, for China to be aligned to these recommendations, the country will be in a position to be a positive force in the post-U. S. Afghanistan, to ensure long-term stability and cohesiveness of the South Central Asia states and the prosperity of their nations. To both Pakistan and Iran, China can present potential for the growth of mutually beneficial economic relations and security cooperation, if the countries can tread carefully and assess risks and opportunities optimistically. In the coming years this region will flourish if only the governments of the countries in the region will respect one another, embrace each other, and fight for the *causa pacis et prosperitatem*, the cause of peace and prosperity.

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