



China's Policy towards Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan

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Abstract:

Historically, China's relations with Afghanistan encompasses more than seven decades of bilateral relations. From 2014 onwards, a significant shift was reflected in the diplomatic relations from a less-engaged diplomatic stance to a far active engagement. However, in the wake of US forces' withdrawal and the Taliban recapturing of Kabul, China's foreign policy conduct towards Afghanistan has become a strange puzzle, which needs to be deeply studied and explored. China's tacit recognition and tactful dealings with the Taliban regime demand a thorough analysis. Therefore, the objective of the present research is to analyze China's foreign policy behavior towards Afghanistan under Taliban regime. To get in-depth analysis, this study has applied descriptive and analytical research design and has used the qualitative data collection and data analysis tools and techniques. The major findings of the research show China's visible but a slight tilt towards Taliban since the latter took control in Afghanistan in August 2021. The study concludes that the major characteristic of the current China's policy towards Afghanistan is a "cautious yet engaged" policy posture, primarily due to the strong interplay of core security challenges and economic interests, respectively.

Keywords: China, Afghanistan, Taliban, cautious, constructive engagement, militancy, security challenges, economic interests

INTRODUCTION

In the prevailing international politics, among several non-traditional security challenges the emergence of the militant non-state actors is the most daunting challenge to the states' security. Following 9/11 and the US' war against terrorism - primarily after the attack on the soil of Afghanistan - an unrelenting wave of militancy initiated worldwide. Nevertheless, the emergence of some economic giants like China resulted in the weakening of US' military role in Afghanistan. Since the US' gradually diminishing military role in Afghanistan, the vacuum has been filled by the Chinese economic engagements. Chinese interest in Afghanistan, however, is also developed due to the security challenges to China, emanating from Afghanistan. Since the departure of American forces from Afghanistan, and the Taliban retake of Afghanistan, the question of China's policy toward Afghanistan has become very crucial.

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LITERATURE REIEW

A large number of academic literature concerning the departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the reasons of the Taliban resurgence, the chaos country suffered in the form of civil war and the emerging role of China is available. However, among the researches, a few scholars have discussed China's policy towards Afghanistan in the wake of Taliban controlled Afghanistan. A brief review of literature on existing studies on Chinese policy towards Afghanistan has discussed China's economic interest in Afghanistan (Zhang, 2022; Blumenthal, et. al., 2022; Zhou et. al., 2022, and; Niu & Huang, 2022). The available literature on China's economic activities in Afghanistan discusses the security challenges which at times create hurdles on the way to smooth completion of investment and energy exploration projects. Some of the available studies on China's relations with Afghanistan have been written mainly in the backdrop of Chinese concerns on the likely support and contacts of Afghan militants with the Chinese banned separatist organization namely the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). However, a thorough analysis on the emerging Chinese engagements in Afghanistan is missing.

Therefore, the present study is aimed to fill the research gap which is existing in the wake of Taliban control over Kabul and the Chinese policy posture on it. The main questions of the research are: What is the nature of China's role in Afghanistan? What are the core interests and challenges for China in Afghanistan? How China is navigating its foreign policy in Afghanistan keeping in view an overall abandoning stance of the international community.

To address the raised questions, the present study has borrowed the realist approach and the theory of national security interests. Since the approach of national interest provides an effective tool to analyze the states' foreign policy behavior and the international politics, to analyze Chinese policy posture towards Afghanistan, the analytical application of national interest will help in understanding the policies of China as an influential regional and global power.

The study is divided in three major portions other than the introduction and conclusion. It starts with briefly discussing historically apathetic relations, and the shift in China's interests in Afghan affairs in the last two decades. A detailed account in light of the current situation in Afghanistan help in understanding China's engagement policies and strategies in Taliban ruled Afghanistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative and analytical. It used descriptive and analytical research design that aims to explore and evaluate the Chinese policy towards Afghanistan under Taliban rule. The data has been collected from the secondary sources of proven credibility. It includes books, research papers, reports, articles etc. Thematic analysis method has been used to scrutinize the data, find patterns, draw generalizations and make conclusions.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINA'S POLICY SHIFT TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, which has a 76-kilometer border with China, was a low-key country in Chinese foreign policy until the late 1970s. When Soviet Union (Russia) invaded Afghanistan, China considered it as a grave threat to the security of her western borders. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, China and Afghanistan's Mujahideen engaged in a brief military cooperation under CIA and Pakistan's management (Small 2015, 124-25). Following Russia's exit from Afghanistan in February 1989 and

until the commencement of the Afghan Civil War, China had a neutral posture on Afghan problems. After the first attempt of Taliban rule in Afghanistan in 1996, China abstained to recognize Taliban regime just like all the international community except Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, this was the period when China regarded Afghanistan as a critical state due to its apprehensions about the security situation in its restive Western Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XAR) and because of the ties between Uygur separatists and Taliban. After the incident of 9/11, China took advantage of the opportunity to combine its operations against separatist tendencies with those against Afghan extremists (Ludwig 2013, 402). However, not pledging any military cooperation with the US or NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan, China remained concerned that the presence of foreign forces should not be prolonged (Ludwig 2013, 402). With the establishment of the provisional government under Karzai as the President of Afghanistan in late 2001, China maintained diplomatic contact with Afghanistan (Hong, 2013, 3). Nevertheless, until the first announcement of US under the Obama administration in 2009 that the US forces will end their combat mission in Afghanistan in 2012, the Sino-Afghan interaction was limited to exploration, small-scale economic projects and humanitarian efforts (Hong 2013, 3). From 2001 to 2013, Beijing provided nearly 1.5 billion yuan (approximately \$240 million) in financial aid to Afghanistan (Huasheng, 2015). China gave Afghanistan an observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2012 ("China, Afghanistan in Strategic Partnership," 2023).

China's Shifting Stance in Post-2014 Scenario in Afghanistan

In the post-2014 situation, when the United States finally confirmed that it would withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan, the intensification in the bilateral relations between China and Afghanistan became obvious, given the commencing of Maritime Silk Road Initiative in 2013,³ which was later replaced with Belt and Road Initiative. One of the significant reasons for China's keen interest in Afghanistan in post US and NATO forces withdrawal scenario is that the security calculus should not be disturbed as it can directly disrupt the BRI, (Chia, 2021), particularly its two major projects i.e. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and China Central Asia-West Asia Corridor which have direct geographical proximity with Afghanistan (Zhang, 2022).

In 2014, President Xi Jinping invited President Hamid Karzai, and an agreement on the strategic partnership was signed between the two countries. Besides, China started focusing on diplomatic initiatives among regional countries for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue and made consistent efforts through various diplomatic channels for an Afghan-led-Afghan-owned solution to the Afghan issue (Niu & Huang, 2022). In order to engage Afghan leaders in the peace process, China initiated a number of bilateral and multilateral initiatives which also included talks with Taliban.

³ China announced the idea of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) in 2013 as a development strategy to boost infrastructure connectivity throughout Southeast Asia, Oceania, the Indian Ocean, and East Africa. The MSR is the maritime complement to the Silk Road Economic Belt, which focuses on infrastructure development across Central Asia. The MSR and Silk Road Economic Belt jointly formed the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative (Green, M. J., 2018).

A few details of bilateral and multilateral engagements which show China's utmost desire to make peace processes a success are mentioned under the headings of bilateral and multilateral engagements in Afghanistan.

Bilateral Engagements

The year 2014 marked a crucial turning point in upgrading the bilateral partnership to a strategic and cooperative partnership level (Dhaka, 2014). In October 2014, Afghanistan's newly elected President Ghani visited China and held meeting with President Xi Jinping (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2014). President Xi hailed his newly-arrived guest as an old friend of the Chinese people. He was prepared to work towards "a new era of co-operation and to take development to a new depth," ("Afghanistan's new president," 2014). China and Afghanistan established concrete forms of security and intelligence cooperation, including the deployment of Chinese People's Armed Police forces to help Afghan counterparts in patrolling Badakhshan province (Rolland, 2014). China also initiated reconstruction projects such as building *Jamhuriat* Hospital, expansion of Kabul University, and solar power plants. China pledged US\$327 million in October 2014 (Martina, 2014).

In November 2014, Chinese State Councilor Guo Shengkun visited Kabul and met President Ashraf Ghani to discuss the issues of regional cooperation and security. Afghan President Ghani thanked China for its cooperation with Afghanistan; the President said, "the two countries will remain friends, and Afghanistan is committed to staying a good partner in establishing peace, stability, and economic growth in China and the region," (Embassy of Afghanistan, 2014). Security officials such as the Minister of Public Security as well as the Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Qi Jianguo, also visited Kabul (Huasheng, 2015).

China provided humanitarian assistance to disaster victims across Afghanistan in 2016, (Zhang, 2022). China not only kept engaged with Afghan government officials but also hosted Taliban on its own territory several times between 2014 and 2019 (Zhou, et. al., 2022).

Multilateral Engagements

To take part in the regional initiatives aimed to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the region at large, from 2014 till 2016, China actively participated in a number of initiatives meant to ensure 'Afghan led and Afghan owned' reconciliatory process. In this regard, China's chairmanship of the Conference on International Cooperation in Asia (CICA), Istanbul Process in October 2014 - also known as the Heart of Asia, held from 2014-2016 - was the most significant initiative. This conference witnessed the participation of 46 countries and international organizations, with the United States attending as a "supporting nation." During the opening ceremony Premier Li Keqiang illustrated that the Chinese side resolve the Afghan issue by; i) "continue to firmly adhere to the friendly policy towards Afghanistan, ii) support Afghanistan in promoting peaceful reconciliation and reconstruction process, iii) help Afghanistan in capacity building and integration into regional cooperation" ("The Fourth Foreign Ministerial Conference," 2014).

Similarly, several trilateral dialogue processes mainly China-Russia-Pakistan dialogue for Afghanistan in Moscow in late 2014 (Khan, 2017) and the consecutive four China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Dialogues were hosted by China. The quadrilateral peace talks, which include

Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and China, was also an extremely important initiative in which China emphasized to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan (Khan, 2016).

In the month of August, shortly prior to the collapse of the Afghan republic, a representative from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was questioned regarding the potential implications of a Taliban-led Afghanistan on China. In response, the spokesperson expressed China's preparedness to sustain the advancement of amicable relations and cooperative engagement with Afghanistan (Zhou, et. al., 2022).

Since the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, China seems desirous to extend its policies of cooperation with Afghanistan, but the concerns about Taliban constraint it from doing so. This is the reason that China's post-August 2021 foreign policy towards Afghanistan can be regarded as another shift from constructive to cautious yet engaged foreign policy.

Post-August 2021 – An Engaged Yet Cautious Policy

Following Taliban takeover, Afghanistan immediately suffered an unprecedented economic, financial and humanitarian crisis (Zhou, et. al., 2022). Previously, Afghan economy was largely depended on the foreign aid; however, when Taliban came into power, the official aid was stopped along with the freezing of over \$9 billion Afghan foreign assets (Zhou *et. al.* 2022). This put Afghanistan in a challenging situation. Also, the US and the most of Western powers abandoned Afghanistan, in view of their failure to achieve last twenty years' objectives in Afghanistan (Cullen, 2023). Thereby, all eyes were on China as an influential economic power.

According to Feng Zhou, who is affiliated with the Institute of Public Policy at South China University of Technology, China's five-pronged engagement policy towards Afghanistan involves; pragmatically and cautiously accepting the Taliban's dominance in Afghan affairs, preventing Afghanistan from reemerging as a safe haven for terrorists, facilitating an inclusive politics in the country, demonstrating a greater degree of humanitarian concern, and lastly chastising the United States and the West for abdicating duty (Zhang, 2022). In the light of current China's bilateral and multilateral engagements, it is important to highlight what are possible Chinese interests in Afghanistan which compel it to remain engaged in Afghanistan and what are the serious issues and core concerns which restrict it to actively engage in Afghanistan.

Bilateral and Multilateral Engagements

China took a cautious stance in its engagements with Taliban on a bilateral level by making possible regular consultations though at not much higher level yet playing a leading role in the regional multilateralism to facilitate Afghan reconstruction (Zhang, 2022). For instance, the Chinese diplomats are in regular consultation with Afghan authorities and are willing to strengthen their normal relations further. China is also agreed to support Afghanistan in various sectors for mutual benefit. On March 10, 2023, in a meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in China, the Chinese Ambassador to Kabul, Mr. Wang Yu emphasized on enhancing political & economic relations between the two states and highlighted the importance of convening & participation in the regional foreign ministers meeting ("Mr. Wang Yu called," 2022). In the same month, another meeting between both countries' foreign ministers took place on March 24, 2023, at Storai Palace. There, Wang Yu discussed political, economic & transit issues, air corridor, dried fruit

export, educational scholarships, visa issuance, commencing work in the mines sector, Afghanistan's role in BRI & other matters of significance ("Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi," 2022). Similarly, on May 23, 2023, Chinese Ambassador Mr. Wang Yu in his meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi assured the latter that China and Afghanistan would start their direct flights from 24th May, while cooperation on Ainak copper mine would be advanced. Besides, the export on fruits like pomegranate, the house-building project, and the renovation of *Jamhoriyat* hospital were some of the agendas agreed upon for further cooperation. Previously, China had also actively helped the Afghan earthquake hit victims in Khost & Paktika in July 2022 ("Special Envoy on Afghan Affairs," 2022). It can be hoped that such regular meetings and low-profile initiatives by China would later lead to mega projects and initiatives with the Taliban government.

However, the other aspect of Chinese diplomacy with the Taliban government which is shown during the multilateral engagements is that China is expanding plans with Afghanistan mainly on the security matters of the region. Also, during the foreign minister's meeting, held in May 2023, between China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the trilateral cooperation was pledged to cooperate on security and counterterrorism. Apart from this, China's foreign ministry was also interested in investing in Afghanistan and showed readiness to make joint efforts with Afghanistan and Pakistan to implement the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative ("China, Pakistan and Afghanistan," 2023).

During the previous year, the Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi also attended the Regional Foreign Ministers Dialogue in China on the invitation of Chinese authorities in March 2022. This visit was important because the Chinese authorities arranged Afghan Foreign Minister's meeting with Russian diplomats in China. The Afghan Minister expressed his delight in Russia's acceptance of new Afghan diplomats in Moscow. On that occasion the Russian FM said that the international community must play a positive role in Afghanistan and continue its cooperation with the new government to resolve the recognition issue. Besides, Mr. Lavrov offered humanitarian aid and showed willingness for the Afghan Embassy to operate in Moscow ("IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi," 2022).

Similarly, another occasion was the Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi's meeting with Chinese authorities when they invited FM Muttaqi to attend the Afghanistan and its neighboring countries' foreign minister's dialogue in China. China hosted the third Afghanistan's neighbors' foreign ministers meeting, which the IEA Foreign Minister attended for the first time. The foreign ministers of Russia, Qatar, and Indonesia also attended the meeting. On that occasion, the Afghan FM adhered that Da'esh had disappeared from Afghanistan after many attacks by the Taliban forces; he expressed dissatisfaction on propaganda which was going on about Da'esh from outside. Minister Muttaqi called upon neighboring countries to support the new government, saying that it was in the interest of all. He said, "the Afghan government is committed to addressing all concerns." ("IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi," 2022)." It was indeed a diplomatic success of both China and Afghanistan that all the major regional countries aimed to cooperate with Afghanistan. Like the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the representatives from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also stressed the need to implement major economic and transit projects through Afghanistan. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Quraishi also said that the question of recognizing the

new Afghan government should be resolved with the consent of all regional countries ("IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi," 2022).

Another high-profile meeting between the Chinese FM Wang Yi and the Afghan FM Muttaqi was convened in China in which FM Muttaqi showed eagerness to revive the trilateral meetings and emphasized that the three countries' FMs should continue a comprehensive cooperation through this mechanism. He called for enhanced political & economic cooperation among the three countries. Afghan FM expressed his gratitude to China for convening the trilateral meeting; Minister Muttaqi said, "the new Afghan government has close relations with China & Pakistan, a good opportunity has opened up for regional economic cooperation that calls for enhanced cooperation among the three countries" ("The Afghan, Pakistani & Chinese FMs," 2022). Minister Muttaqi said Afghanistan wants economic cooperation instead of donation; he also desired to connect South Asia to Central Asia via transit route, and to export Afghan products to China and India via Pakistan. Similarly, Afghanistan supported BRI & showed her eagerness to play a beneficial role in the region through the project ("The Afghan, Pakistani & Chinese FMs," 2022).

China's Balancing Interests and Concerns in Afghanistan

Core Interests

There is no denying the fact that at bilateral level, China is the only country which has actively formed informal diplomatic relations with the Taliban government; besides, China's whatsoever engagements, as the second largest economic power, give some significant indications to both its friends and foes. Therefore, despite having limited engagements in Afghanistan, there is much to see as to what has compelled China to remain intact with the Taliban regime. The foremost interest might be the natural resources of Afghanistan such as lithium, coal, iron, copper, oil, and gas reserves (Donnell, 2021). In the post US forces' departure scenario, the other regional powers, most prominently India, might come to explore Afghan mineral resources, which can be an upsetting for China (Hussain, 2020). Beijing signed a 25-year contract with Afghanistan in January 2023 to extract oil from the Amu Darya Basin in Afghanistan. Other lucrative business deals are also in talks with the Taliban government (Kaura, 2023). On the other hand, under the deal, the Chinese company will get oil from an area in the northern provinces of Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab that is 4,500 square kilometers (1,737 square miles) in size. "This project will give jobs to more than 3,000 people in the area" ("Afghanistan Signs Oil," 2023). The Amu Darya Oil Contract 2023 is the first major agreement between the Afghan government and a foreign company since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021. The company (CPEIC) will invest \$150 million in one year and \$540 million in the next three years. In this contract, Afghanistan will have a 20% share, and this share will increase to 75%.

Other than the exploration of natural resources of Afghanistan, the next most compelling point for China to get engaged with Afghanistan is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). When China launched BRI, it offered all states to take benefit from the project; however, on China's offer, the Ashraf Ghani regime was not able to join BRI because of the US' pressure about curtailing Chinese influence (N. A. Nawidy, personal communication, October 2, 2023). Now, after US' forces departure, China can connect Afghanistan by building a road and rail infrastructure. China is engaged in the rebuilding process of the country's road infrastructure. The recent example is the

Jalalabad-Kabul Road that links eastern Nangarhar and neighboring Kunar and Laghman provinces to Kabul. Similarly, China has also worked on a road in central Bamyan Province. The road built by the Chinese construction firm, China Road and Bridge Corporation, passes through more than 20 villages. China has also constructed water canals and hospitals in Afghanistan (Huaxia, 2022).

China's third most important interest is building a rail infrastructure in Afghanistan which safely links China to the rest of Central Asia and Middle East through its Western province Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XAR). The first train on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan corridor - which carried two containers in context of a testing period - departed from the Chinese city of Kashgar on September 13, 2023 and reached Hairatan in Afghanistan on Friday, September 23, 2022, making the service's total transit time ten days (Papatolios, 2022). Chinese leadership is ready to support the implementation of trans-regional projects, including the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line and a railroad connecting Western China with Central Asia, as stated by China's special envoy to Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, at the "Afghanistan: Security and Economic Development" conference, held in Tashkent in July 2022. It is expected that North-South Trans-Afghan railway will intersect with a proposed West-East line that would connect Iran to China via Afghanistan and Pakistan, also via Kabul and Peshawar. The Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line will reduce the time and cost of transporting goods along the existing highway between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul. Similarly, the power lines from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are also being extended to Kabul and across Afghanistan (Ellis, C, 2022), as building power infrastructure is the key to achieve the target of generating trade and economic activities in the region.

Security Interests

China's primary concern in Afghanistan is regarding the militancy in Afghanistan which could have the potential of spillover effect into Central Asia and China's Xinjiang province. Beijing is particularly worried about the presence of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in Afghanistan and its impact on the separatist activities in Xinjiang (Chew, 2021). It is obvious to Chinese authorities that previously, under US and NATO forces, it was not easy for militants to disturb the security situation in the surrounding regions of Afghanistan. However, in Taliban regime, despite Taliban assurances to Chinese authorities that Afghanistan would not let Uygur separatists to use the soil of Afghanistan against China, China is still concerned (Ali, 2022). Therefore, keeping Taliban in confidence was important for China. In 2021 Tianjin meeting, Foreign Minister Wang gained guarantees from Taliban that it would 'absolutely not allow any forces to do anything harmful to China in Afghanistan's territory'. This was a reconfirmation of the same guarantees that the Taliban had provided to China in the 1990s during the first rule of Taliban in Afghanistan (Zhou, et. al., 2022).

Despite China's willingness to have mega joint projects with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, the two countries do not trust each other. A report points out, "The Taliban-led administration has signed a contract with a Chinese company to extract oil from the Amu Darya basin in northern Afghanistan. But recent attacks on Chinese nationals and other marks of instability will likely make Beijing proceed cautiously" (Yeh, 2023). The contract was the first major agreement between the two parties since Taliban hold power in Afghanistan. There is no denying the fact that since 2022, there has been an increase in terrorist attacks; however, Afghanistan has made assurances that it will not allow any armed group to exploit its territory for activities against China and Pakistan ("G20

Summit," 2023). The insecurity in Afghanistan poses a threat not only to the China's long-term project of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but also its flagship project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Besides, it is also diminishing the chances of expanding the BRI to Afghanistan. However, an 'important chapter,' according to the Afghan's Taliban government, has ushered since China has officially accepted the Afghan ambassador to Beijing (Gul, 2023). Hong Lei, the director-general of the protocol department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, called the development an important step in the further strengthening and expanding of the positive relations between Beijing and Kabul (Gul, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Over the last twenty years, the Afghan economy remained heavily depended on the financial aid from foreign governments and non-governmental organizations to meet the majority of its significant financial expenditures. Since the departure of US and its allies/NATO forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, the economic and political infrastructure of the country collapsed. Taliban's takeover created an economic and investment vacuum along with the issues of violence, poor infrastructure, and landlocked location of the country. China's approach to the Taliban regime was somewhat different from that of the other major powers, while still being in line with the overall aspirations of the international community. Unlike other countries, China continues to prioritize its interaction and communication strategy with the Taliban's ruling hardliners.

Thus the study concludes that the China's engagement with Afghanistan has evolved strategically following the US withdrawal. While officially not recognizing the Taliban regime, China has emerged as a prominent international player in Afghan affairs. This engagement is driven by China's significant interests in the region, particularly its Belt and Road Initiative and the security interests. However, China is approaching this with caution, while being mindful of Afghanistan's historical reputation.

This prudent approach reflects China's awareness of the risks involved, even when it acknowledges the importance of Afghanistan and seeks to explore the opportunities through various infrastructural projects and mining ventures. Overall, China's engagement in Afghanistan is a calculated move, where it is balancing its strategic interests with careful consideration of the risks associated with the region's complex geopolitical landscape.

In addition, China has asked regional actors and the world community to play a positive role in Afghanistan to improve the war-torn country through various regional and global efforts. China stresses Taliban for women education and general human rights, much like the rest of the world.

China's constructive engagements in Afghanistan, in form of building rail and road related projects, may help the land-locked Afghanistan in the realization of the full potential of the region by making it a link among the states of the region. Besides, China's approach to help Afghanistan build its economy and improve people's lives demonstrates China's commitment to maintaining peace, and its firm resolve to protect global security which is also China's new resolve under its global project of Global Security Initiative (GSI).

China exercises caution due to its valid security apprehensions regarding the militancy in Afghanistan - specifically in terms of the risk of terrorism and extremism being extended to its

Xinjiang region. China has encountered difficulties associated with Uighur separatist movements and extremism in Xinjiang, heightening its unease over the possibility of Afghanistan providing support or safe havens to such elements.

Time is, however, ripe for China to move a step forward and transform the informal bilateral engagements into formal engagements with Afghanistan, specifically in view of the newly announced initiatives by India under the India Middle East Europe Corridor (MEEC), in the recent G20 summit in New Delhi.

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