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**CHINA'S NEOIMPERIALIST  
GAMEPLAN IN  
TALIBAN-AFGHANISTAN**

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## CHINA'S NEO-IMPERIALIST GAMEPLAN IN TALIBAN-AFGHANISTAN

-Alakshendra Singh

As Ambassador Zhao Sheng, presented his credentials to Mohammad Hasan Akhund, the de facto Prime Minister of the Taliban-led government (*Al Jazeera and News Agencies*), it brought into focus China's growing interest in Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. China since then has embarked on a slew of engagements with Taliban aimed primarily at mitigating domestic security threats and enhancing its foot print in the economic domain with special interest in minerals and raw material. All these actions hint towards China's neo-imperialist design not just in Afghanistan but across the world in multiple forms under the garb of BRI and OBOR.

Key Words: Neo-imperialism, China Afghanistan Nexus, Tali-Afghan

The central-eastern province of Logar has been the in eye of the storm of violence that has raged in Afghanistan since the invasion of USSR in 1979. The blood on Logar's soil notwithstanding, it is mineral wealth under the soil that caught the attention of the world in 2007–08. An untapped copper reserve, believed to be worth at least \$50 billion USD and world's second-largest copper deposit has been invested in, by the new found ally China (*ANI*). This piece will attempt to connect the various dots, apart from just the economic ones to this newfound Chinese interest in Afghanistan under the Taliban and its influence on the geopolitics of South Asia, with special emphasis on India.

The engagement with Taliban was viewed as a strategic counter move against the outcomes of the recent G20 summit in India. Notably, the summit placed emphasis on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a potential competitor to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This, along with Italy's withdrawal from BRI, may have pressured China to seek cooperation with a regime like the Taliban, despite its isolation due to human rights concerns, particularly regarding women's rights. Starting with the economic prospects, which also include the Taliban's eagerness to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative and Related Projects (BRI), as confirmed by acting Commerce Minister Haji Nooruddin Azizi (*Cash*). This goal overlaps with their economic agendas to tap into Afghanistan's vast and rich oil and mineral reserves, which the Taliban do not have the funding or capability to exploit. Most recently, acting Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan Wang Yu presided over the signing ceremony of a deal under which the Chinese company will be extracting Oil from a combined landmass of 4,500 square kilometres across the northern provinces of Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab (*Al Jazeera and News Agencies*).

Representatives from the Chinese state-owned enterprise met with the Taliban's Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Salam Hanafi, urging the resolution of "fundamental issues" to initiate the Aynak Logar copper mining project (*ANI*).

Additionally, Beijing intends to address a major security concern on the western front that stems from Islamic terror organizations breeding secessionism in Xinjiang. According to the United Nations, since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, it has become a breeding ground for more than 20 Islamic terrorist organisations. East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM) is the primary source of terror that has targeted Chinese nationals and development projects (Dou and Tan). Afghanistan is known to be one of the biggest sources of opium and other psychotropic substances, now being trafficked into China to fill the void of drugs from the Golden Triangle of Myanmar-Laos-Cambodia (UNODC). For capping the fount of narco-terror nexus, it is crucial for China to ensure the viability of Tali-Afghan rule. On the same note, Beijing is using the above mentioned multi-million dollar deals to sway the Taliban further towards them. Chinese telecom tycoon Huawei has struck a deal in Afghanistan to establish surveillance systems across the country to assist with the crackdown against terrorism and smuggling (Bloomberg).

String of Pearls (Kumar) is often the adage used for Chinese presence encircling India with Military Bases and the presence of China in Afghanistan can also be viewed as a counter to India's influence in Afghanistan with Indian government taking nascent steps in engaging with Taliban (Roy). The presence of military foot hold in neighbourhood follows a copy book method of Chinese neo-imperialism which commences with economic engagement and loans which more often than not are defaulted on by the host nation and this leads to transfer of real estate on long term lease. Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is a classic example which is now under Chinese control for 99 years (Abi). China's funding of a Tajik outpost has been revealed in the province of Badakhshan, which is near the Xinjiang province (Pirnazarov and Auyezov). This also plays into the transportation projects that have been inked by both sides to connect Uzbekistan and China, which further helps them gain more and more leverage in the region and establish a strangle hold in Central Asian Republics (CAR).

All this intense commerce and transaction planning has brought global attention to China's means of achieving economic hegemony. Showing no hesitation in legitimising a state that has been internationally blacklisted for its crimes against women. They have been on a spree of signing deals with an organisation that has proven in the past on multiple occasions to be unpredictable for violating multiple peace treaties and talks. This is also exactly where their initiatives stand out from the rest, who failed; there has been no information of any Chinese troops entering the Afghan borders. Although they had earlier claimed to not get involved with Afghanistan, their recent transition has had no political or military aspect to it.

These steps prevent them from facing any of the challenges foreign powers have faced within this land. As long as Beijing continues to be the sole economic benefactor, they will not be committing the same mistakes as the others. For New Delhi, this could be brewing trouble in the future because this is a massive step by Beijing to gain power in multiple aspects. Coupled with their already increasing presence in (Indian Ocean Region) IOR, it could be detrimental for India. Making the Indians wonder whether it is worth shaking hands with a state that was globally identified as a terrorist organisation not long ago.

But as of now, the Taliban government is too volatile for China to begin any actual work in Afghanistan, It would be logical for them to wait for the Taliban to show what kind of state they create and the sort of power they wield for all we know, they could too succumb to Afghanistan's reputation of being a "graveyard of empires."

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