

Assessing the Effects of Afghanistan's Situation on China's National Interests and Regional Stability

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Abstract: The US and NATO's August 2021 departure from Afghanistan have resulted in significant security risks that now confront China and its Western neighborhood. This article examines two threats to China's national interest, both within its western province and its neighboring regions. The first threat pertains to China's restive Western province of Xinjiang bordering Afghanistan and is characterized by its unrest and instability, specifically due to the presence of separatist movements and acts of terrorism. The second concern involves the implications for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central and South Asia, thereby presenting potential economic threats. This paper conducts a comprehensive study to explore the context and significance of China's Afghan policy and aims to highlight China's role in safeguarding its national interests and promoting regional stability.

Keywords: Afghanistan, China's National Interests, Regional Stability, Security Threats, Xinjiang, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Introduction

On July 8, 2021 President Biden made an announcement to conclude the United States (US) military operation in Afghanistan. The intended date, for the completion of this mission was set to be August 31, 2021. During his address, President Biden acknowledged that at the time of his assumption of office, Taliban's military strength had reached its zenith, since the initial US invasion in 2001 (White House, 2021). The strength of Taliban combined with the subsequent departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan had an impact on the regional geopolitical landscape. Moreover, the spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation, compounding the challenges within Afghanistan—a scenario that extends beyond national boundaries, possibly yielding broader implications for the entire region—furthermore, the resurgence of the Taliban has heightened the COVID-19 threat, intricately complicating

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Afghanistan's journey towards recovery from prolonged conflict, while amplifying pre-existing challenges predating the pandemic (Essar et al., 2021; Blanc, 2020).

This transformation evoked deep-seated concerns regarding regional stability and the potential escalation of instability in the form of terrorism (Cordesman, 2023). According to Yaroslav Trofimov and Jeremy Page of *The Wall Street Journal*, following the collapse of the US-backed Afghan government on August 15, 2021, China expressed a sense of satisfaction, viewing it as the humiliation of its main global rival, the United States. The collapse of the US backed government initially seemed satisfying for China, but their withdrawal from Afghanistan has brought forth a fresh set of complexities and challenges.

As the resurgence of the Taliban and the potential spillover of extremism into Xinjiang pose direct threats to China's national security, China's primary interest in Afghanistan centers around safeguarding its own security and stability, particularly in the Xinjiang province and the vast Western region of China bordering Central and South Asia (Zhang, 2022). Zhang (2022) further argues that, given its rising global power status, China's involvement in Afghanistan is also driven by geographic proximity and historical ties with the region. Combating Uighur and other associated forms of terrorism, separatism and extremism remains a central goal of China's Afghanistan policy. While much has been made in the Western media about China's ambitions to wield significant influence in Afghanistan, China understands that Afghanistan remains a risky investment proposition and they caution against any hasty involvement (Murtazashvili, 2022). Amidst the increased violence and instability in Afghanistan resulting from the abrupt US withdrawal, China has been compelled to adjust its security and economic strategies due to the direct threat posed by the Taliban's control.

In light of these pressing concerns, the primary objective of this research paper is to investigate two key threats that have emerged in the aftermath of the US and NATO's departure. The first major concern pertains to the substantial security threat facing China's western province of Xinjiang. During the late 1990s, the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan amplified extremism in Central Asia and neighboring regions, potentially influencing Xinjiang and its Uighur separatist threats (Davis, 2008). Similar to the past experiences, the current instability in Afghanistan creates a fertile environment for nurturing Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, raising legitimate concerns about spillover effects into Xinjiang. Both, internally within the Xinjiang province and externally, in the broader vicinity of western China, stability is at stake.

Secondly, the paper aims to examine the implications of the Taliban's control in Afghanistan on China's economic investments, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI extends through Central Asia as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and through South Asia as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Afghanistan has been embroiled in conflict after conflict since the late 1970s, resulting in the deterioration and destruction of infrastructure that would have otherwise been maintained and developed over time. This tumultuous history raises concerns about the potential impact of instability in northern Afghanistan on the realization of the full potential of the Chinese BRI projects (Cowan, 2018). Thus China acknowledges the importance of evaluating and managing the risks that come with its investments, such as potential disruptions to infrastructure projects and the overall economic collaboration envisioned under BRI. Through an analysis of these factors, this study aims to enhance the understanding surrounding China's engagement in Afghanistan and its broader implications for domestic and regional security. In light of the evolving situation in Afghanistan it becomes imperative to conduct an assessment of China's Afghanistan Policy.

Research Objectives

This study focuses on two main issues arising from the US and NATO's exit from Afghanistan. It examines the heightened security risk in China's Xinjiang due to the Taliban's past influence in the region. The study also explores how the Taliban's resurgence impacts China's economic investment i.e. the Belt and Road Initiative, considering Afghanistan's conflict-ridden past. The analysis aims to enhance understanding of China's engagement in Afghanistan, its broader security implications and steps taken to ensure stability amid evolving circumstances.

Security Challenges in Xinjiang

For over 2,000 years, Beijing has steadfastly viewed Xinjiang as an integral part of China (Thum, 2018). On the hand, there is a difference in the Uighur perspectives. Because of its cultural and political heritage, Uighur's see Xinjiang as separate and distinct. While the Xinjiang region is officially designated as autonomous, the degree of autonomy granted to the Uighur people has been limited in practice (Fuller & Starr, 2003). Consequently, Uighur's aspire to reclaim political empowerment and strive to establish a truly autonomous, if not independent, entity for Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking population (Castets, 2003). While it is important to note that not all Uighur political movements turn to violence there have been instances where some have resorted to guerrilla operations and acts of terrorism. One notable

incident took place in 2009 when riots broke out in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang during protests led by the Uighur's against state supported migration of Han individuals. Initially, the protests were reported to be peaceful, but they turned violent when Chinese paramilitary forces were deployed, using live ammunition against the protesters according to human rights activists and Uighur eyewitnesses (Khan, 2020).

This has led Beijing to perceive all Uighur's as potential terrorists or terrorist sympathizers, with subsequent years witnessing authorities attributing attacks at various locations to Uighur's, including a local government office, train station, open-air market and even Tiananmen Square in Beijing (Maizland, 2022). As per the Chinese government, the Uighur separatist movements were accountable for more than 200 attacks from 1990 to 2001 resulting in numerous casualties and injuries to hundreds of individuals despite the Chinese authority's extensive measures to curb their activities. These incidents of sabotage, destruction of property and disruption of public order resulted in legitimate security concerns for the Chinese government in Xinjiang (Chung, 2002). Chung (2002) further argues that, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as the Chinese Communist Party gained control over Xinjiang, a large number of Uighur intellectuals and elites resisted the same and thus started the movement for independence or a movement for greater autonomy from the PRC. However, the PRC viewed this movement as a threat to its national unity and responded with force that kept the lid on ethnic separatism in the region through iron-fisted control.

Prompted by concerns over extremist activities among certain Uighur individuals, the government took action by establishing what they refer to as "Political Re-education Camps", while others call them detention camps. Those not detained have been subjected to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, forced labor and forced sterilizations (Chestnut Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). As a result, the separatist's sentiments of the Uighur's have only been amplified. Hence, Xinjiang grapples with an imposing security challenge stemming from an unending cycle of revolt and repression. The region's unrest is a result of a complex interplay of internal and external elements, which together contribute to its instability.

Internal Factors

The instability in Xinjiang is affected by intricate internal or domestic factors. In her book titled "*The Art of Symbolic Resistance; Uighur Identities and Uighur Han Relations, in Contemporary Xinjiang*" (2013) Joanne Smith Finley emphasizes how Uighurs are brought

together by a centripetal force, which is defined by their shared language, religion and culture.. The Uighur people have had a rooted sense of identity that predates the arrival of the Chinese Communists. This identity is shaped by factors, such as shared cultural beliefs, social customs, religious practices and moral values. Consequently their strong sense of identity greatly influences their aspirations for self determination.

Finley (2013) further argues that the roots of Uighur separatism are complex and extend beyond mere nationalism and their aspirations for self determination. Her book identifies “minority policies” as a major strain on Uighur-Han relations and that the separatism stems from the Uighur’s having experienced a sense of marginalization and discrimination historically. At the heart of these problematic policies lies a recurring pattern where Han settlers in Xinjiang continuously benefit from privileges due to their close connection to the main organs of political and economic power (Chaudhuri, 2011). According to Chaudhuri’s (2011) analysis the Uighur’s have shown their dissatisfaction with the growing number of Han Chinese in their region. They believe that this poses a threat to their identity. The unequal treatment of Uighur’s compared to Han Chinese worsens the division between them which contributes to the challenges of Uighur separatism in the region. In summary the instability, in Xinjiang is influenced by a combination of internal factors working together.

External Factors

The Chinese government is particularly concerned about Uighur separatism and extremism which is greatly influenced by transnational Islamic movements. Certain Uighurs have reportedly joined extremist groups and received training abroad, while specific separatist factions have forged alliances with international jihadist organizations, aligning with the global jihadist narrative of Uighur Muslim oppression (Guo and Attané 2019). This has further fueled their radicalization. There has been a history of connections and cultural links between Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. These connections have allowed for the exchange of ideas and have also provided an opportunity for the external actors to support Uighur separatism. Beijing has, thus, since long been concerned about the spread of al-Qaida and Taliban style influence in the Xinjiang province (Zambelis, 2010). The withdrawal of the US and NATO forces has further heightened China's concerns, particularly in light of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the increasing instability in Pakistan.

The Uighur diaspora has been actively engaged in various forms of activism and appeals to host states, aimed at promoting anti-Chinese propaganda and rallying Uighur's abroad for a united front against China, resulting in the establishment of numerous diaspora organizations (Shichor, 2017). The Uighur diaspora and activists, in reaction to what they consider as the Chinese Communist Party's act of genocide, have launched global initiatives to raise awareness of the ongoing situation. One of these organizations is the Campaign for Uighurs (CFU), a non-profit founded in 2017. The Chinese Communist Party, on the other hand, asserts that such movements offer opportunities for the Uighur separatist movement to operate. Further stating the role of ETIP as contributing both internally and externally to the Uighur separatist movement, as it operates within Xinjiang while also being connected to and influenced by external actors and ideologies (Appelman, 2014).

Instability in Afghanistan and Its Impact on Xinjiang

Given the shifting landscape in the region particularly with the recent takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, it is evident that the security situation there has a direct influence on the stability of Xinjiang. Developments in Afghanistan could pose serious problems for Xinjiang as it faces a potential risk of instability and insecurity spillover (Zhou, Su, & Yuan, 2022). Zhou et al. (2022) further state that, the ongoing sheltering of militant, extremist and terrorist groups by the Taliban increases the likelihood of extremist ideologies, radicalization and violence seeping into Xinjiang. China's consideration of the possibility of instability in Afghanistan, even before the US and NATO withdrawal, was fueled by the potential exacerbation of existing tensions and unrest within the province, a concern that has only intensified following the Taliban's takeover. Neglecting the impact of Afghanistan's security situation on Xinjiang would undermine efforts to maintain peace and security, potentially leading to the destabilization of both territories.

There is compelling evidence indicating that Uighur separatist groups have established terrorist cells in Afghanistan and formed alliances with jihadist factions associated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Xu, Fletcher, & Bajoria, 2014). According to Sun (2020), China has conducted a strategic assessment of Afghanistan and has accused Afghanistan of serving as a safe haven for training, planning and coordinating activities against the Chinese government, particularly in reference to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The interactions and cooperation between Uighur militants and various extremist groups in Afghanistan have facilitated the transfer of radical ideologies, combat experience and resources. According to the Chinese

perspective, the disorder in Afghanistan fuels fundamentalism, which poses a direct threat to domestic security. As a result, the Afghan link significantly amplifies the security risks perceived by Beijing in Xinjiang, and the withdrawal of troops has further heightened the unpredictability of the security situation, creating a potential ground for the reemergence of violence. China thus views Afghanistan as an inseparable part of building Xinjiang's security.

The security situation in Xinjiang is shaped by a combination of internal and external factors. Internally, the strong sense of Uighur identity, historical grievances, economic disparities and concerns over cultural suppression has fueled separatist sentiments. Externally, transnational Islamic movements, historical connections with neighboring regions and international perceptions of Chinese policies have provided avenues for external influences. The recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan further highlights the interconnectedness. Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial in addressing the security challenges faced by Xinjiang and promoting stability in the region.

Security Implications for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central and South Asia

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a global infrastructure development strategy initiated by the Chinese government in 2013. Central Asia holds significance within the BRI as it acts as the land based pathway for the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). By traversing Central Asia the SREB serves as a trade route fostering connectivity between China and Europe. This not only facilitates trade, but also strengthens ties between these two regions. Additionally, Central Asia's strategic location enhances the SREB's overall economic impact, providing a bridge for seamless exchanges and cooperation along the route. It serves as a cornerstone of China's neighborhood diplomacy and has the potential to alter the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region.

Further the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an initiative of the BRI, holds great significance for South Asia. If it becomes fully functional, CPEC has the capacity to establish stability and enhance integration within the region presenting substantial prospects for regional economies. It aims to transform South Asia's economic outlook through infrastructure development, energy sector improvements, business development and financing (Faisal, 2019). CPEC strengthens Pakistan's economy and connects Gwadar Port with China's Xinjiang province, facilitating closer ties with South Asian nations. Moreover, CPEC not only serves as a strategic solution for China to tackle the Malacca Dilemma but also faces the challenge of

potential transnational movements of Muslim insurgents that could potentially disrupt the project's stability. Despite potential threats, CPEC deepens the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and China and benefits both countries through development and improved connectivity (Garlick, 2018).

The strategic significance of Xinjiang for both the SREB and CPEC projects is undeniable, considering the expanse of these initiatives (Mackerras, 2015). However, this expansion also exposes the projects to security threats, particularly from the neighboring regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The proximity of Xinjiang to these bordering areas raises concerns about potential security challenges that could impact the successful implementation of the projects (Chen, Qin, & Mo, 2021). Therefore, acknowledging the strategic importance of Xinjiang becomes imperative for addressing and mitigating security risks to ensure the smooth progress and success of both the SREB and CPEC. Given the current instability in Afghanistan, it becomes even more critical for China to focus on this region concerning its BRI projects in Central and South Asia. Addressing the security concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan will be vital, as any disruptions or threats in these areas could have ripple effects on the overall success and regional connectivity of China's BRI.

As stated by Lain & Pantucci (2016), instability in Afghanistan presents several challenges that could affect the SREB projects of China. Further, the inefficiency of the Afghan state in enhancing its security and public administration makes it vulnerable to attacks. Moreover, the fragmentation of the Taliban and the rise of violence pose significant threats, as they could create openings for extremist groups like Daesh to gain footholds in parts of Afghanistan (Lain, & Pantucci, 2016). Since the withdrawal of US and NATO forces, the situation in Afghanistan has become more dangerous, with conflicts between the Taliban and the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK). The ISK aims to spark a sectarian war in Afghanistan and weaken the Taliban's control. Additionally, ISK has targeted Chinese and Russian assets in Kabul, adding further complexities to the security situation in the region. (Felbab-Brown, 2023). The security vacuum in Afghanistan hinders the country's ability to participate in the BRI and poses risks to ongoing projects. It also limits the potential for new Chinese investments in Afghanistan, as China would need to allocate significant resources to ensure project security.

Furthermore, the instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan jeopardizes the stability and security of the CPEC, which is crucial for China's access to the Indian Ocean. The adverse security situation in Afghanistan poses a dual threat to the CPEC project. Firstly, it creates a conducive

environment for terrorist and insurgent threats within Pakistan, potentially disrupting the smooth progress of CPEC initiatives. Secondly, the instability in Afghanistan hinders the prospect of extending CPEC to Afghanistan, limiting the corridor's regional connectivity (Notezai, 2021; Mushtaq & Shad, 2022). Pakistani policymakers are concerned about the sanctuary that the Pakistani Taliban finds in Afghan territory, enabling them to train militants and strategize attacks before returning to Pakistan. The complexity of the situation is further compounded by Pakistan's perceived incompetence in effectively countering the threat and its historical support for the Afghan Taliban (Mir, 2022; Ahmed, 2023). Given these challenges, China needs to prioritize addressing the threats posed by Afghanistan to safeguard the stability and progress of the CPEC project, as the successful realization of CPEC is crucial for both China and Pakistan's strategic and economic interests.

The instability in Afghanistan thus presents challenges for both the SREB and CPEC projects. As China aims to transform Central and South Asia's landscape through BRI it is crucial to address the security threats arising from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Growing regional insurgencies and tensions between the Taliban and Pakistan underscore the imperative to address security concerns. Xinjiang's safety is of utmost importance for China as it serves as the starting point connecting the SREB to Europe and CPEC to Gwadar. To accomplish BRI's goals and maintain stability as well as connectivity China must actively address security challenges while strengthening cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

China's Approach to a Taliban led Afghanistan

In navigating its engagement with a Taliban-led Afghanistan, China employs a unique approach rooted in historical ties and geographic proximity, respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, counter-terrorism efforts, pandemic responses, investments both within and beyond the BRI framework, continued engagement for regional harmony and active peace-building efforts. China's commitment to regional stability is closely tied to its relationship with Afghanistan, which plays a pivotal role in fostering peaceful cooperation and security in the region. These interrelated approaches collectively shape China's Afghan policy.

China's historical ties and geographic proximity play a significant role in shaping its policy towards Afghanistan. Both nations have maintained strong and amicable friendship since establishing diplomatic relations in 1955. Their robust relationship is evident in the presence of embassies in each other's capitals, facilitating effective communication and collaboration.

Additionally, their shared 90 km border at the end of Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, in the northeast, has not only encouraged trade but also fostered cultural exchanges (China Briefing, August 2022). China has consistently upheld non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, respecting its sovereignty (Sun, 2020), as it envisions Afghanistan with an open and inclusive political structure, characterized by moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2023)

Further, China's counter-terrorism efforts and its strategic response to security challenges illuminate the core of China's Afghan policy, especially in the face of a resurgent Taliban and the looming specter of extremism infiltrating its Xinjiang region. China has adopted a pragmatic approach towards Afghanistan, aiming to prevent the country from becoming a haven for terrorism that could threaten domestic stability (Ghosh, 2022). Nonetheless there are security threats to China, Afghanistan and the surrounding region posed by terrorist factions like the ETIM operating in Afghanistan. China actively encourages Afghanistan to independently combat terrorism, all while adhering to principles of non-interference. This encouragement arises from China's urgent need for a stable Afghanistan that can contribute to regional peace and development (Li, 2021). During the 5th China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, participants discussed the security threats posed by ETIM operating in Afghanistan. They collectively emphasized the principle of non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs while demonstrating a shared commitment to fostering peace, stability, and reconstruction in Afghanistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2023). This aligns with China's persistent encouragement for Afghanistan to devise and execute effective strategies against terrorist organizations. In essence, China's steadfast support for Afghanistan's anti-terrorism efforts, driven by its imperative need to address the Xinjiang threat is firmly grounded in its national interests.

To delve deeper into China's multifaceted approach to Afghanistan, we must now turn our attention to its substantial economic investments in the region and their implications for both Afghanistan and broader regional stability. Chinese investments not only aim to strengthen economic ties but also serve to safeguard its national interests and enhance regional security. China has proposed significant investments in Afghanistan, including a USD 10 billion commitment to lithium deposits, a 25-year oil extraction contract and various infrastructure projects such as repairing the Salang Pass, constructing a hydroelectric dam, and asphalt development along the Kumar and Laghman Road (Economic Times, 2023). These

investments are closely linked to China's BRI (Saleem & Hale, 2023), which aims to expand its infrastructure network into Afghanistan, potentially reshaping the country's economic landscape.

China's economic investments, as stated by Khan, Dawar, & Khan (2023), serve a threefold purpose: firstly, channeling funds into Afghanistan's economy, potentially reducing regional instability and conflicts, aligning with the goals of China's BRI. Secondly, these financial commitments aim to counteract the spread of terrorism and extremism in the region, driven by China's concerns about militant groups using Afghanistan as a launch pad for attacks on Chinese territories, especially Xinjiang, with its substantial Uighur population. Lastly, these investments play a pivotal role in advancing regional stability and cooperation, as China views Afghanistan as a crucial bridge linking South Asia and Central Asia.

While there are differing perspectives on these investments, with some seeing economic opportunities and potential legitimacy for the Taliban government, ongoing concerns revolve around security threats posed by groups like the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and the risk of Afghanistan becoming overly reliant on China, potentially affecting its sovereignty and economic stability (Clarke, 2023; O'Donnell, 2023). Afghanistan's deficiency in robust state institutions and legislation to address environmental consequences adds to these apprehensions. Consequently, ongoing watchfulness and diplomatic efforts are indispensable to guarantee that these investments, as underscored by Cheema (2023), translate into tangible benefits for Afghanistan's populace and contribute to the enduring stability of the region.

Moreover, an examination of China's multifaceted approach to Afghanistan includes its substantial humanitarian efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, China has demonstrated significant support for Afghanistan by dispatching multiple shipments of essential medical supplies, each exceeding 10 tons and facilitating teleconferences for sharing pandemic control insights (Wang, 2020). This assistance underscores China's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Afghanistan in pandemic response. Furthermore, China's proactive aid extends to various forms of support, including medical supplies, vaccines and financial assistance, reflecting its dedication to helping its neighbor during challenging times (Xinhua, 2020; BBC News, 2021). Beyond immediate relief, this humanitarian effort aligns with China's broader goal of cultivating strong ties with the Taliban-led government and bolstering its regional influence.

China acknowledges the significance of its regional influence in promoting stability in Central and South Asia. However, security challenges emanating from Afghanistan could impede overall regional connectivity and progress (Murtazashvili, 2022). Despite these challenges, China has demonstrated its commitment to Afghanistan's well-being by providing humanitarian aid, including significant contributions in food, medicine and winter supplies. China has also facilitated trade by opening an "air-corridor" and providing duty-free preferential treatment to a majority of Afghan goods imports. Additionally, China actively promotes cooperation with Afghanistan on major projects, boosting revenue, employment opportunities, and the capacity for independent development (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2022). However the instability in Afghanistan poses a challenge when it comes to incorporating it into the broader BRI projects.

China's approach to Afghanistan's peace building process underscores its strategic imperative: the preservation of regional security due to Afghanistan's proximity to China's Xinjiang region and the potential for extremist groups like the ETIM to exploit a destabilized Afghanistan. To counter this threat, China actively engages in peace talks and facilitates discussions among the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan, aiming to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist breeding ground (Li, 2021). Simultaneously, Afghanistan holds significance within China's BRI, which seeks regional connectivity and trade across Asia. China's growing interest and involvement in Afghanistan align with its efforts to ensure stability. Even amid U.S.-China geopolitical competition, both countries share an interest in achieving Afghan stability, as the U.S. troop withdrawal opens opportunities for China to play a more prominent role (Azad, 2020). This engagement involves interactions with the Taliban and measures to secure its internal security against Uighur separatist groups using Afghanistan as a base.

In the "Joint Statement of the Second Informal Meeting on Afghanistan between Foreign Ministers of China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran" (2023), China collaborates with Russia, Pakistan, and Iran in diplomatic efforts concerning Afghanistan. Their collective commitment to respecting Afghanistan's sovereignty, supporting an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" approach, and addressing terrorism-related security issues highlights the shared concerns about various terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. This statement underscores China's advocacy for inclusive governance, the safety of foreign institutions and citizens, and economic development in Afghanistan, with a focus on dialogue and consultation for a political settlement, humanitarian assistance, and capacity building. China's role in Afghan peace talks, as reflected in the joint statement, involves supporting an Afghan-led political process, condemning

terrorism, promoting dialogue and encouraging economic cooperation and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. This multifaceted approach, encompassing security, strategic and economic interests, defines China's active role in peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

These interconnected engagements underscore China's dedication to ensuring stability in Afghanistan and the broader region. As the situation in Afghanistan continues to evolve, China's role as a key player in promoting peace, development and security in the country remains pivotal, reflecting its interests in the region.

Conclusion

To summarize, this research paper offers an analysis of China's policy towards Afghanistan. It sheds light on China's engagement with Afghanistan and its current efforts to promote regional stability and protect its national interests. The withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan has brought challenges for China particularly as it closely monitors the security situation in its western province of Xinjiang. The paper explores the security threats faced by Xinjiang examining both factors such as Uighur identity and historical grievances as well as external influences from transnational Islamic movements that complicate the security landscape.

Furthermore the paper emphasizes the importance of Xinjiang to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central and South Asia highlighting the risks posed by instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Recognizing the interplay between Xinjiang's security and Afghanistan's situation is crucial for maintaining peace in the region while successfully implementing BRI projects. China's approach of balancing cooperation with addressing security risks demonstrates its commitment to stability and development. This research provides insights for policymakers, scholars and stakeholders who wish to understand China's involvement in Afghanistan and its impact on regional security. Moreover, this paper highlights the aspects of China's approach towards Afghanistan emphasizing the need for cooperation and proactive measures to tackle security concerns. It is crucial to research and analyze the changing situation in Afghanistan and its impact on China's national interests and regional stability. Further research can explore strategies that effectively promote peace, stability and economic growth in the region while advancing China's Belt and Road Initiative in Afghanistan fostering cooperation between nations.

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