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China-Afghanistan Relations: Change to the Path of Strategic Partnership

Abstract

The China and Afghanistan relations have been regulated based on Beijing's approach to regional and international developments in the past decades. The pulling out of American forces from Afghanistan and the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban led to a change in China's approach to Afghanistan from different points of view. America's withdrawal will alter the balance of power in Afghanistan and, as a result, its surrounding areas. China's approach to Afghanistan has always been based on security

considerations, and now economic considerations have also been added to it. China's big economic plan in Pakistan and Central Asia is one of the most imperative security concerns of China, along with the concern of the link between the extremist groups in Afghanistan and the Uyghurs in the neighborhood of this country. The presence of the Taliban in power and the withdrawal of America from Afghanistan have led to a change in the relationship pattern from calculated indifference to strategic partnership. Components such as environmental uncertainty and strategic adaptation became the basis for the acceptance of this model by China. In the current research, we are investigating the reason for the change in China's attitude towards Afghanistan from calculated indifference to strategic partnership, and we want to provide a clear picture of these developments by expressing China's activism in Afghanistan.

Keywords: *Extremism, Afghanistan, China, Strategic Partnership, Taliban.*

Çin-Afganistan İlişkileri: Stratejik Ortaklık Yolunda Değişim

Öz

Çin ve Afganistan ilişkileri geçtiğimiz on yıllarda Pekin'in bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmelere yaklaşımına göre düzenlenmiştir. Amerikan güçlerinin Afganistan'dan çekilmesi ve Taliban'ın Kabil'i ele geçirmesi, Çin'in Afganistan'a yaklaşımında farklı açılardan bir değişikliğe yol açmıştır. Amerika'nın çekilmesi Afganistan'daki ve dolayısıyla çevresindeki güç dengelerini değiştirecektir. Çin'in Afganistan'a yaklaşımı her zaman güvenlik kaygularına dayanıyordu ve şimdi buna ekonomik kaygılar da eklendi. Çin'in Pakistan ve Orta Asya'daki büyük ekonomik planı, Afganistan'daki aşırılık yanlı gruplar ile bu ülkeye komşu Uygurlar arasındaki bağlantı endişesi ile birlikte Çin'in en önemli güvenlik kaygularından biridir. Taliban'ın iktidardaki varlığı ve Amerika'nın Afganistan'dan çekilmesi, ilişki modelinde hesaplanmış kayıtsızlıktan stratejik ortaklığa doğru bir değişime yol açmıştır. Çevresel belirsizlik ve stratejik uyum gibi bileşenler bu modelin Çin tarafından kabul edilmesinin temelini oluşturmuştur. Mevcut araştırmada Çin'in Afganistan'a yönelik tutumunun hesaplanmış kayıtsızlıktan stratejik ortaklığa doğru değişiminin nedenini araştırıyor ve Çin'in Afganistan'daki aktivizmini ifade ederek bu gelişmelerin net bir resmini ortaya koymak istiyoruz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Aşırıcılık, Afganistan, Çin, Stratejik Ortaklık, Taliban*

Introduction

Investigating your relationship with your Afghan and Afghan relationships in the decade will be distracted and close to your Afghanistan's internal regulations, regulatory and international competitors, and internationally competitors. Extreme threats were.

In this situation, we can discuss China's discreet assistance in arming the Mujahideen in 1980 amid the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (Sharma, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, the relationship report based on the needs assessment of two actors has no place here. The official relations between China and Afghanistan started in the 1950s with the recognition of China by Afghanistan. China's approach to Afghanistan has always been economic with an emphasis on

security considerations. In the past decades, security considerations have always been the first priority in the eyes of the Chinese authorities towards Afghanistan. Its example is the Soviet Union occupation of Afghanistan, the civil war in Afghanistan, the domination of the Taliban and finally the presence of American forces.

China, as a great power that is establishing hegemony in its surrounding environment, evaluates every move and the existence of competing actors in the region viewed in terms of rivalry with that specific actor. The United States and Soviet Union presence in Afghanistan in the past decades can be evaluated from this point of view. In this scenario we can allude to China's cooperation and non-cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan.

In the 1980s and with the attack of the Soviet forces on Afghanistan, China stood by the United States and against the Soviet Union, and after the attack of the Western coalition against the American leadership in Afghanistan in September 2001; it was present for military and security cooperation with it. It did not protect itself from the efforts of foreign actors and stayed away from Afghanistan as much as possible for political reconciliation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. It also avoided accepting the title of partner of the West in the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Huasheng, 2012, p. 12). While the coalition forces were fighting the Taliban threatening China's strategic interests, Beijing started exploring and monitoring Afghanistan's underground resources and this action was severely criticized by the United States and even Russia (Hong Zhao, 2013, p. 3). The withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan has serious consequences on regional equations in South and Central Asia. Therefore, all regional actors are closely monitoring developments and presenting multiple scenarios to minimize possible security and political costs. Any change in the arrangement of forces in Afghanistan will definitely affect the current and future interests and goals of the actors in the region (Tiezzi, 2021, p. 31). China, as a neighboring country of Afghanistan and one of the most important actors that finds itself in an economic war with America, is closely monitoring the developments in Afghanistan. From China's point of view, whatever creates the field of international terrorism and extremism in the margins of its territorial borders and around its big economic plan, it will be specially monitored. From this point of view, Afghanistan's development has both components.

Despite Beijing's previous approaches to the developments in Afghanistan, China has expressed apprehension regarding the shift in threat dynamics following the withdrawal of American forces from this country. Since 2016 and with increasing speculations for the pulling out of American forces from Afghanistan and the creation of a security vacuum in this country,

Beijing, like other neighboring countries of Afghanistan, has started a plan to secure its border lines with Afghanistan (Saleh and Zakiyeh, 2020, p. 12).

China has detailed plans for Afghanistan without foreign military forces for several reasons:

1. Afghanistan plays a pivotal role in the planning of a belt, serving as a significant focal point in one direction.

2. There are religious extremists on either sides of the border lines between Afghanistan and China, and China is worried about the link between the Uyghurs with Daesh and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

3. In order to expand its political influence in the region, China should expand its influence to the remaining areas such as Afghanistan and advance its security and political goals through the economic window.

4. Beijing expects the material and moral support of the United States from the Chinese Muslim protesters in the west of this country.

For this reason, the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan despite the continuing crisis in this country has aroused the suspicion of China. As we said, China, as one of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, has taken up a "wait and see" stance in the last twenty years. Afghanistan's developments are chosen.

However, since 2016, with the withdrawal of American forces, China has changed its policy of conscious and calculated indifference towards Afghanistan and adopted a step-by-step cooperation approach. Strategic partnership is a new model of relations between governments that has entered the international relations literature from business and organizational literature dating back to early 20th century. In the current study, according to the agreement to change the pattern of China's cooperation with Afghanistan, we want to present a picture of the actions of foreign actors in Afghanistan's neighborhood in order to create a basis for other researches in this field. In this research, by introducing the model of strategic partnership and explaining it, we will apply two economic and political components separately to the two variables of China's attitude and actions towards Afghanistan. Then we draw conclusions and make strategic recommendations for Afghan policy makers.

2 Background of the research

The field of Afghanistan studies in general and the relations between Afghanistan and other countries in particular has always faced the lack of first-hand study resources. In this study of the relations between Afghanistan and China and the analysis of the changes made in the past

decades compared to recent years, especially after the fall of Kabul in the summer of 2021, we pay attention to two groups of study sources:

1. Sources that have dealt with the developments in Afghanistan.
2. Sources that are focused on the foreign relations between China and Afghanistan from the past decades until now.

Among them, we refer to these cases:

In the article "China and Afghanistan: China's interests, positions and views", Husheng Zhao paid attention to China's security approach to Afghanistan, relying on the component of foreign powers present in Afghanistan, such as the Soviet Union and the United States.

In the article "Taliban's Conundrum for China", John Kalbarz (2021) has discussed the effects of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul on China's foreign relations and geopolitical and security policies in front of the western borders and beyond.

Referring to the neglected link of Afghanistan in China's economic master plan, he has focused on Pakistan's option to reduce the possible consequences of insecurity in Afghanistan and China's interests in the region.

Angela Stanzel (2016) in the article "China's strategic benefits in Afghanistan" focused on the historical relations between China and Afghanistan and pointed out that Afghanistan has never been the first priority actor for China and Afghanistan is always It is intended to achieve another goal.

For example, Afghanistan is currently the silent part of China's economic super plan, and in the case of the connection of the Central Asia sector, this plan has been in the role of the regional communications authority in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the field of changing the relations between the two countries.

Sanyan (2020) in the article "Evaluation of China's strategy from Afghanistan" on China's security concerns from the connection of extremist groups on the edge of China's border lines, the increase in security costs of the One Belt, One Road plan and the spread of insecurity from Afghanistan to Manaf China's strategy in the region has emphasized. He has spoken about the vulnerability of China's economic strategy plans from the spread of extremism in the Sokhn region, and therefore, he has explained and analyzed China's approach to Afghanistan. UNAMA's 2021 report is another document that will be useful in understanding the developments in Afghanistan. In this report, it is based on the effects of the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, which provides a suitable picture for analyzing the conditions. The data of OC Internet Statistics Center is also useful for applying and checking

the statistics of commercial exchanges of Afghanistan and China to provide better analysis and picture of the conditions.

3. Theoretical foundations: The theoretical foundations of the concept of strategic partnership

According to various variables, relations between governments follow several patterns such as coalition, union, cooperation, partnership and conflict; In some cases, adding words like "strategic" means to improve the level of interests and stability of relations between two actors. In the modern era, the international space made governments inevitably change the pattern of relations and redefine the previous patterns. In this framework, new models such as strategic partnership were proposed.

Until the 1990s, this phrase was rarely used in international relations literature, but currently, actors like China have signed more than 50 documents and more than 20 strategic partnership documents. It is noteworthy in connection with the strategic partnership documents that the relationship exhibits a diverse range and extensive scope, so that some of the closest countries in terms of political and international positions have not yet signed an official strategic partnership document with each other, while the actors who have the highest level of differences with each other in the political, economic and security fields have signed these documents. In other words, two actors may be each other's "strategic partners", but they have not established relations based on "strategic partnership". The crucial aspect is the absence of a unified definition of the strategic partnership concept, even among governments that extensively employ this model in their diplomatic relations. Some of Varzan's thinkers believe that there is no single description for such expressions, and each partnership should be explained separately as new phenomena in a special context. In this case, China's effort to create a strategic partnership between China and Afghanistan is different from the strategic corporation among China and Pakistan or between China and Russia, and it corresponds to the conditions, components and the special pattern of historical relations between the two countries. Despite the diversity of definitions, functions and components, strategic partnership can be included in a range of minimum and maximum components.

According to Mansingh, a strategic partnership is created when two actors have a common concern to upgrade their stable relations to the highest level and create a comprehensive model to deal with possible threats in future cooperation. In this case, the two governments accept joint commitments to promote common goals, but this does not mean entering into a new union (Mansingh, 2005, p. 21-22).

Sechowska considers the creation of a strategic corporation to be dependent on seven preconditions:

1. The existence of partnership in relationships.
2. Convergence of strategic goals.
3. Belief that the joint effort will strengthen the field of achieving common goals.
4. Desire for long-term partnership to achieve long-term goals.
5. Differentiation in the level and form of relationships according to their relationships with other actors.
6. Developed infrastructures in the association among two actors.
7. Positive space in the association among two actors (Czechowska, 2013, p. 51).

It is worth noting that the word "strategic" is not used in its military sense, but it is exploited in the commercial field. The strategic concept means a long-term plan of action aimed at achieving specific goals to achieve desirable futures. In the functional explanation of the notion of strategic corporation, we can refer to the three criteria considered by Wilkins:

1. The uncertainty in the countries' response to the uncertainties in the international environment, which usually refers to the environment and brings the actors together to minimize costs and flexibility in the face of unknown conditions; Strategic adjustment that considers the degree of partnership of interests, values and ideology of two actors.

According to Wilkins, the durability of the partnership depends on the common understanding of the threat or the achievement of a specific benefit, and as long the strategic partnership leads to the development of cooperation, the values and norms in this framework will gradually change.

2. The principle of a system means a common goal around which the strategic partnership is formed. This goal becomes a comprehensive framework of agreement and common understanding and provides the *raison d'être* of the partnership.

This point should be considered that the partners are always prone to deviate from the declared goals due to the change of the environment and international conditions. Therefore, the role of political leadership is important in the process of forming a strategic partnership (Wilkins, 2.10, 125, 2008). One of the attractions of the strategic partnership model for countries is its informal nature and its very low commitment costs compared to models like the union. The challenging conditions and total uncertainty in Afghanistan have made China eager to choose a strategic partnership model, because the multiple security and economic benefits of this country in Afghanistan cannot be ignored. Also, the nature of power in Afghanistan and the instability and ambiguity in the approaches of other regional and international actors towards

Afghanistan do not allow this country to continue with calculated indifference or to choose binding approaches. Therefore, relying on the willingness of the Taliban to cooperate, China has gradually changed the pattern of its relations to a strategic partnership.

4. An Overview of China-Afghanistan Historical and Contemporary Relations

In the theoretical application of the strategic partnership model, it is essential to delve into the historical context of the ties between these two nations. Building on this premise, we will provide a concise overview of the historical interactions between the two nations in the subsequent discussion so that the emphasis on the trade and security component is taken into account in its historical context. The relations among China and Afghanistan go back to the Han Dynasty in China and the flourishing era of the ancient Silk Road (Com. Iranica).

In the ancient times, the fame of the region that is now called Afghanistan was due to its dedication to Buddhism and its location on the Silk Road. Religions such as Christian Nestorians and later Islam entered China from Afghanistan. The relations and non-official relations between China and Afghanistan go back to ancient times, where the victory of the Han dynasty over the (Daywans) led to China's control over the northern parts of Afghanistan. In Chinese historical documents, Kabul is mentioned as (Kaofu). Kaofu is a strategic city, a source of infinite wealth in the Hindu Kush mountains and the heart of the trade routes from Central Asia to India, and in Chinese historical documents, the dominance of this city has been emphasized a lot (Yu-Shen, 1966, p. 31-35). The main point in the ancient relations among the two countries is the trip of the Afghan envoys to the city of (Luoyang) (then the capital of China) and to pay respect to the emperor of the Tang dynasty with the aim of strengthening trade relations and dialogues about the Silk Road. Because the Chinese interpreted this trip as a proof of the renewal of the agreement between the Afghans and the emperor, and they place that land under the (Tang) dynasty in ancient times.

During this period, China tried to protect its western borders by sending military forces, and after a while, the presence of Chinese military forces in the eastern and northern parts of Afghanistan was considered normal. So that in the year 659, Sogd, Ferghana, Tashkent, Samarkand, Balkh, Herat and Kabul were under the rule of Emperor (Gaozong), and Herat, Afghanistan, Bukhara and Samarkand became part of Tang land.

(Indian historian Menon) writes about the Chinese: China sent an army of 100,000 people to the Pamir mountains, moved towards Kashgar and crossed Afghanistan to occupy the Hanze Valley (Haywood, 1998, p. 19) .Tang era was one of the most well-known historical periods of China from the abundant wealth perspective and improvement of livelihood. In the same period, Afghanistan, which was located along the Silk Road, benefited from this point of

view. What is remembered from the past of the relations among the two countries depends on repelling the threat of invaders to the western borders of China and protecting the land trade route from Central Asia and Afghanistan to South Asia and beyond Iran.

The trend of relations until the starting of the Second World War and Japan's attack on the Muslim areas of China in the Second World War was the same. At this time, China sent representatives to get the support of other countries. In 1939, Hoi Moslem (Mafolyang) and one of the Muslim Uyghurs, (Isi Yusuf Alpetkin), went to meet the authorities of Egypt, Syria and Turkey (Hsiao, 2010, p. 17).

Also, Tagore and Gandhi, one of the prominent Indian leaders, and the Pakistani leadership wing met with the Chinese Muslim delegation headed by Ma Fuliang. With the bombing of the Muslim areas of China by Japanese fighters, the expression of empathy and support for the Asami countries increased a lot. Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Afghanistan and Iraq officially expressed their sympathy with the Muslims of China.

Beyond the historical relations that a part of it was presented, the official beginning of the relations among the two countries goes back to January 20, 1955. Afghanistan stood among the early nations to acknowledge the establishment of the People's Republic of China and in 1955 Abdul Samad settled in Beijing as the first ambassador of Afghanistan (Iranica.com).

In continuation, Chinese Prime Minister Chuen Lai traveled to Afghanistan in January 1957 along with his deputy "Oolong". This marks the inaugural official visit by a senior Chinese representative to Afghanistan. During this trip, Choenlai met with Prime Minister Zahir Shah and Davoud Khan, Deputy Prime Minister Ali Mohammad and Foreign Minister Mohammad Naeem. The visit of the Chinese Prime Minister to Afghanistan created a new level of relations based on mutual interest between the two countries and established a solid foundation for the expansion of friendly relations in the future.

In October 1957, Dawood Khan, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, also traveled to Beijing at the invitation of China. During this trip, he met with Mao Zedong, Vice President Chu Te and Liu Shaochi, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China (Synovitz, 2013, p. 6). The official political relations of the two countries took a more serious form due to China's multi,million dollar aid for the development of Afghanistan during the Cold War and led to the signing of a border agreement on November 22, 1963.

This treaty resolved territorial disputes over the Wakhan Strait (under Afghan control) on the border along Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan and Xinjiang Autonomous Region in China. Based on this agreement, the length of the China-Afghanistan border was determined to

be 92.45 kilometers (Law.Fsu.Edu) .In 1960, China and Afghanistan signed the "friendship and non-aggression pact" in order to expand bilateral economic relations. Since that date, China's approach to Afghanistan has been limited to the economic field and political and security matters have been pursued in a transient, limited and imperceptible manner. It is worth noting that in 2006, they extended the 1960 agreement with the aim of redefining the relations among the two countries based on good neighborliness and respect for region's peace and stability.

During the Cold War and after that, the deployment of the forces of China's strategic rivals in Afghanistan, that is, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, changed China's attitude towards Afghanistan. On December 27, 1979, with the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, Beijing quickly condemned this military attack and refused to recognize the government of Babrak Karmal. The official relations between the two countries have been suspended and the Chinese embassy has been demoted to the consulate and only deals with consular and visa issue (Fmprc.Gov) .From China's perspective, the most significant reason for the Soviet Union's entry into Afghanistan was the tightening of the security fence around this country, and it viewed the developments in Afghanistan from this angle.

With the establishment of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, the relationship between Beijing and Kabul changed from friendly to hostile. Afghan communists have always accused China of supporting anti-communist and anti-government groups in Afghanistan. China also responded to threats by supporting the Afghan Mujahideen and increasing its military presence on the border with Afghanistan. During this period, China imported military equipment from America to defend itself against the Soviet attack. (Star-riditor, 2004, p. 4).

China regarded the presence of the Soviet Union as a regional threat to itself and its ally Pakistan. Therefore, it indirectly joined Pakistan and America's bloc against the Soviet Union and sent weapons to the Afghan militias who were fighting against the Soviet Union (Hilali, 2010, p. 2). Not much information is available about China's approach in the years after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, civil wars, and the deployment of Taliban forces in Afghanistan, and only based on monitoring developments and the level of relations between the actors, it can be said that the withdrawal of troops leaving Afghanistan and the collapse of the Soviet Union was the most favorable scenario. Of course, this section requires a careful examination of documents in Chinese.

The only sign that can be found from the time when the Taliban were in power is the meeting of "Lu Shulin", the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, in November 2000 with Mullah Mohammad Omar. From this point of view, this meeting attracted the attention of the media,

which was the first meeting of a senior representative of a non-Muslim government with the Taliban group. (National Interest, 2015, p. 2). The meeting with the Taliban is due to China's concern about the connection between the Uighur separatist groups in the west of China and the extremist groups in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The US attack on Afghanistan in 2001 was the beginning of a new era in China-Afghanistan relations. In December 2001, a delegation from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrived in Afghanistan to participate in the inauguration ceremony of the interim government. In this trip, the foundations of China-Afghanistan relations were laid in the following years. China recognized it immediately after the establishment of the transitional government in Afghanistan and opened its embassy in this country in 2002. China's policy during this period was to "not enter" into political conflicts and not to accept military commitments in Afghanistan. In January 2002, Hamid Karzai traveled to this country at the official invitation of Jiang Zemin, the President of the Republic of China, and met with high-ranking officials of this country and talked about the assistance of the Chinese government for the settlement and development of Afghanistan. In this meeting, 1 million dollars was donated to Afghanistan in cash. Jiang Zemin also promised 150 million dollars of aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan in this meeting. Also, 30 million yuan was transferred to Kabul by the end of March 2002. The Chinese embassy in Kabul also officially opened on February 6, 2002 (People.Cn2002). And in May of the same year, the Chinese foreign minister visited Afghanistan. During this trip, he met with Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah and an economic and technical cooperation agreement¹ worth 30 million dollars was approved with this country. This agreement was signed during Nematullah Shahrani's visit to Beijing in February 2003.

In November, Abdullah traveled to Beijing to receive the promised aid of one million dollars, and in December, China signed the "Five Countries" agreement, which became known as the Kabul Declaration, with the aim of respecting the neighboring countries. The independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and constant support for the peace process and Reconstruction in this country was signed by five countries. Until 2005, China had strategic concerns about the expansion of the influence of Russia, India and Japan and the continuation of the military presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, but it did not take an overt action to defend against the threat and followed the approach of calculated indifference. got it (Zhao Hong, 2019, p. 1-29).

¹ Agreement of Economic and Technical Cooperation

During this period, China's relations with Afghanistan were mostly focused on infrastructure projects such as the establishment of digital communication networks, road construction, dam construction, construction of hospitals and irrigation systems, as well as limited cooperation in the field of military information.

Hamid Karzai's trip to China in 2006 is considered a turning point in the relations among the two countries. Following this trip, China became the first trading partner of Afghanistan until 2009 (Weitz, 2010, p. 21).

The entry of Afghanistan as an observer member to the Shanghai Organization in 2012 also deepened the relations among the two countries and increased the capacity of China's presence and influence in this country. Since 2012, when the fifth generation of leaders took office in China, China's diplomacy in Afghanistan became much more active and dynamic. This process has continued in various fields including customs, trade and commerce, cultural and student exchanges, development of political and security cooperation. During this period, China strengthened its position in Kabul by relying on financial aid and by accepting the role of peacekeeper; it pursued its goals in Afghanistan as well. The component of economic cooperation, border security, investment in mines and the fight against extremist threats had become an inseparable part of the relations between the two countries.

Since 2017, the announcement of the gradual connection of Afghanistan to regional infrastructure projects has also been accompanied by diplomacy, and the return of the Chinese foreign minister between Afghanistan and Pakistan has strengthened. China tried to establish and pursue infrastructure, security and stability projects in the two countries by establishing tripartite dialogues to strengthen positive relations between Kabul and Assamabad. In this context, he used the tools of the Asian Development Bank and the Shanghai Pact to the end (Diplomat, 2018, p. 3). During this period, China gradually moved from the attitude of calculated indifference to strategic partnership. After the negotiations in Doha and the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and the advance of Taliban forces from the southern regions to the center and north of Afghanistan, the security component became a priority for China. In the continuation of economic cooperation and security concerns, we express China's most important priorities for Afghanistan.

5. Commercial and Economic Incentives

Since ancient times, trade relations among Afghanistan and China have been dependent on the ancient Silk Road and the passage of travelers and merchants. This component has continued in the modern period with many ups and downs. With the difference that instead of

Buddhist pilgrims going to Afghanistan and India, the crossing of extremist forces on either sides of the border has attracted attention.

In the overview section of the relations among the two countries and considering the emphasis on the economic component in that period of time, the matters related to the commercial and economic relations of the two countries were also mentioned. In recent decades, especially after the entry of American troops into Afghanistan, the economic relations among China and Afghanistan continued gradually, but steadily and forward. The withdrawal of the American forces and the uncertainty of the ruler of Afghanistan have definitely changed China's approach towards Afghanistan, and this country needs a change in order to protect its interests in Afghanistan and to protect its interests and security outside of Afghanistan. According to China, stopping or increasing the operational cost of the Contemporary Silk Road is one of America's policies to deal with this country, weakening its economic power and reducing its strategic depth. Using the tools of extremists to make the plan insecure and incite the Uighur people have always been the main options in this field. Therefore, the economic component is also taken into consideration with a security approach to Afghanistan.

The geopolitical capacity of Afghanistan in connection with the markets of South, Central and West Asia, along with rare reserves of silver, gold, lithium, rubidium, cesium, beryllium, copper and iron ore, has attracted this country to China (Independent, 2018, p. 2). On the one hand, mineral reserves can make Afghanistan free from foreign aid. On the other hand, it can intensify the chaos, corruption through illegal mining and delay infrastructure and development projects. Based on this, the trade and economic relations among China and Afghanistan can be divided under the two general headings of economic cooperation and the New Silk Road, which are closely related.

6. New Silk Road

In 2013, Xi Jinping presented China's grand economic plan. China aims to establish an extensive network encompassing railways, energy pipelines, highways, and border crossings. As he announced, with the strengthening of regional connections, the transit bottleneck of Asia will be raised (Chatzky and McBride, 2019, p. 2). By examining the operational and contractual plan of the New Silk Road plan, it was suggested that this plan has eliminated Afghanistan and focused on Pakistan and Central Asian countries.

In response to these speculations, China signed a memorandum of understanding in 2016 to improve the level of bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan in order to integrate this country into the infrastructure network (Safi and Alizada, 2019, p. 2).

According to this agreement, China and Afghanistan put the Kashgar-Kabul rail project and the (five-nation railway) and the connection of Iran, China, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, along with the connection of Afghanistan to Pakistan, on the agenda. (railwaypro.com) .In this context, in September 2016, the first direct train from China arrived in Hayratan in Balkh province. Afghanistan's connection to global and regional markets and the continuation of that, the economic profit through transit can provide stability in Afghanistan (iranica.com). In the past years, China has responded to its lack of presence in the security sector in Afghanistan with this literature. (Ghiasy, 2019, p. 4).

The prosperity of China's ambitious economic strategy hinges significantly on the security and stability prevailing in the region. Therefore, any kind of insecurity and the possibility of its spread to China's peripheral areas, especially Central Asia, will be a security threat for China. The problems of Afghanistan can lead to the realization of these propositions for China.

1. Afghanistan's capacity in achieving China's (Western March) strategy to connect China's passage beyond its western borders. (Yun Sun, 2013, p. 3).

2. Afghanistan's connection to open waters through the CPEC route, and in continuation of that, the connection of Central Asia to South Asia by connecting Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3. Reducing the level of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan with economic convergence between the two actors.

4. Tying regional economic benefits to China's grand economic plan, turning it into collective benefits, and as a result, reducing China's security costs in its possible shutdown.

In this framework, in order to develop economic cooperation and link Afghan businessmen to the economic benefits of cooperation with China in 2006, he worked to involve them by creating a joint economic committee with Afghanistan. Furthermore, by signing two comprehensive cooperation agreements in 2010 and a preferential trade agreement to eliminate customs tariffs in 2017, he took a serious step in this matter. In other words, Afghanistan is the neglected part of China's grand plan, which was blocked by the existence of America and extremist forces there. Based on the approach of confronting America and accepting its costs, one can understand why China is unwilling to increase the level of presence and participation in Afghanistan (theasiadialogue.com).

Achieving China's agreements with Afghanistan is facing many challenges.

1. The growing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have reduced the possibility of Afghanistan's connection to the CPEC plan to a minimum.

In other words, the possibility of a stable bond between the two actors is very far from the mind.

2. The weakness of the government institution, power struggle, endless conflict and the existence of international extremist groups have limited and made impossible the presence of Chinese companies to pursue infrastructure projects.

3. Over the years, the Taliban has received a lot of money for the completion of infrastructure projects and the passage of land and rail commercial convoys.

In the case of continuing insecurity in Afghanistan and forcing China to buy security from the Taliban, this proposition is on the table that the Taliban's income generation from China can lead to the temptation of being close to China's borders and the continuation of the flow of receiving money.

7.Economic Cooperation

Based on the report of the (extractive industry) transparency initiative, the estimated value of Afghanistan's mineral reserves such as gold, copper, iron, rare metals and uranium is over one trillion dollars.

The lack of security and the weak government structure have made the proper exploitation of these mines impossible (IMF, 2019, p. 12).

China has now become the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan. China has invested in the field of mining, so that a consortium of Chinese state-owned companies acquired Afghanistan's largest copper mine in 2008 with an initial contract of 3.5 billion dollars for the mining privilege of Aynak copper (Yun Sun, 2020, p. 4). China hopes that economic cooperation with Afghanistan along with strategic relations with Pakistan will change the political space of the region in its favor. The mega-plans give Beijing the necessary leverage to convince other actors to work with China to solve security problems. Apart from Pakistan, China and Europe also have common interests in creating stability and security in Afghanistan.

In this framework, joint plans are pursued in the region, which can be referred to the collaboration among China and the European Union to strengthen regional connections, in which the European Investment Bank has invested 70 million dollars in the electricity transmission and trading plan. - Southern Yai (Casa -1000) for electricity transmission Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan invested in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

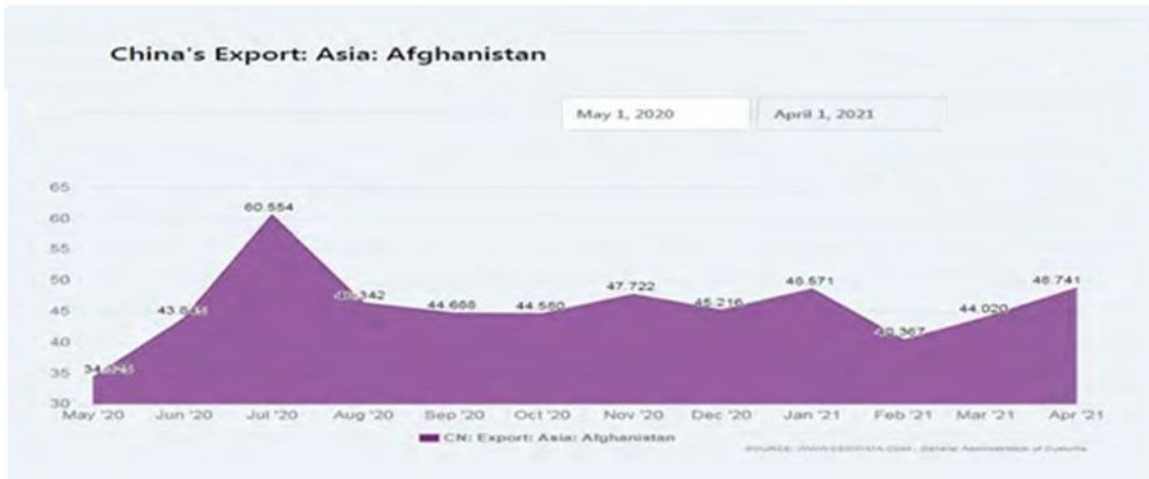
Accepting the responsibility of security in Afghanistan due to China's economic power in the nonexistence of the United States is not desirable for Beijing, and this country is holding back from entering the geopolitical and security game in its region for several reasons. The developments will definitely change China's approach. Statistics help to provide a picture of

business relationships. The volume of China's exports to Afghanistan in 2019 was equal to 600 million dollars, of which 127 million dollars were rubber.

Also, during the same period, Afghanistan exported 29.1 million dollars to China, of which 19.7 million dollars were dry goods (oec.world). Based on the report of the Ministry of Finance of China, this country's exports to Afghanistan in April 2021 are equal to 48,741 dollars, which has increased compared to the figure of the previous month (March exports equal to 44,020 dollars).

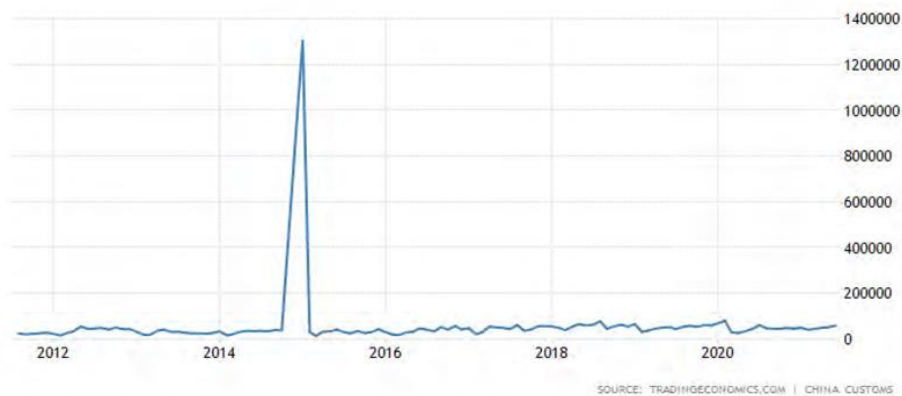
Based on the data published in this report, from January 2001 to April 2021, China has exported an average of \$18,913 per month in goods to Afghanistan. The highest number related to August 2018 is \$76,903 and the lowest is February 2002 (oec.world1.2002).

Chart 1 shows the amount of China's exports in the past twelve months.



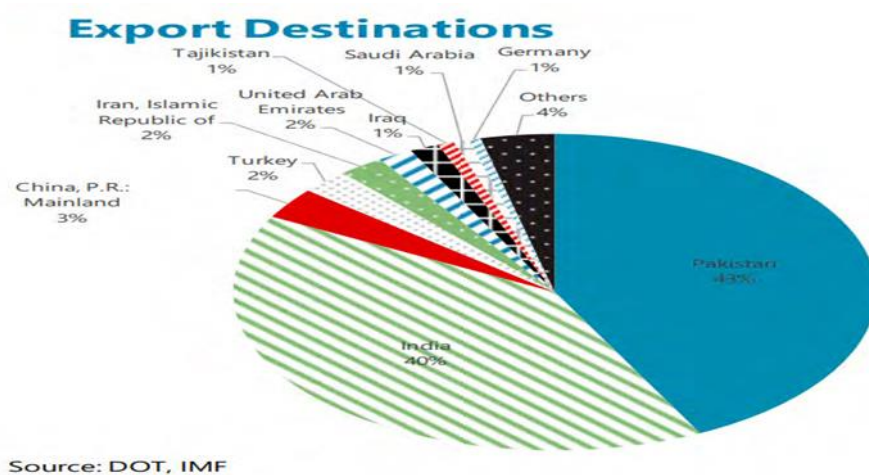
The highest amount of China's exports to Afghanistan in 2020 is related to electronic equipment (\$86.63 million), rubber (\$63.85 million), and industrial and agricultural machinery (\$59.3 million) (tradingeconomics).

Chart 2: China's exports to Afghanistan in the years 2012 to 2021
Source: Tradingeconomics.com



Afghanistan is determined to design measures to improve its trade balance by diversifying export goals and increasing import substitution. Based on the International Monetary Fund report in 2018, exports accounted for 4.5 percent of the gross domestic product, and agricultural products accounted for three quarters of Afghanistan's exports. The immortality of the crisis and the lack of vision of its end have reduced the possibility of (foreign direct investment) to a minimum due to the high risk. Despite this, the largest amount of investment is related to China and the United Arab Emirates. Figure 3 shows the volume of exports and the share of different countries.

Figure 3: The volume of exports and the share of different countries
Source: Dot, HM



8. Strategic Incentives To Increase Participation

8.1 Security concerns

The neighborhood of China's Xinjiang province with the Wakhan Strait, which is a difficult route and a refuge for extremist groups such as the Taliban and other international terrorist groups in Afghanistan, has always been a reason of worry for China's security. According to the Chinese authorities, Xinjiang province has a dangerous security component, namely terrorism, religious extremism and separatism (Stone, 2019, p. 6). The enhancement in the level of security risks in Afghanistan makes possible the connection between the separatist groups in Afghanistan and the Uyghurs of China. It also threatens China's economic plans in Central Asian countries. Afghanistan can create the ground for Uyghurs to connect with other extremist groups in Central and South Asia and pave the way for Afra Togra groups to join the Chinese government (Worldview stratfor.com.) It seems that the most threatening scenarios for the Chinese government is the transformation of Xinjiang province into the next location of terrorist groups after Afghanistan. China always has this scenario on the table as a way to hit the West

on its economic progress and considers the immortality of extremist groups in Xinjiang because the overt and covert support of the United States and even Russia. This concern originates from the fact that many Uighur militias have taken refuge in the Pakistani tribal areas (FATA) and the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan (Small, 2015, p. 3). Along with other terrorist groups, such as the Asma Movement of Uzbekistan, they have allied with the Taliban, Al-Qaeda or Daesh. In the occasion of the conclusion of the Afghanistan issue, according to the agreement made between the extremist militias for the liberation and creation of an Islamic government in Xinjiang, they will join the Islamic Party of Turkestan, and the realization of this scenario means weakening the integrity of the land. China and the increase of security threats will be in the soil of this country (Zhao Hong, 2020, p. 7). Like what happened in July 2009 in Urumqi province, where Chinese military forces killed 200 people. Due to the new movements between the Taliban forces and the Chinese extremists and the strengthening of the said scenario, China's approach has changed from a calculated distance in the last few years to an enhancement in security cooperation. For example, in September 2018, the ambassador of Afghanistan in China announced that Beijing is ready to train Afghan soldiers in China to fight the military and security threats of Daesh and Al-Qaeda. The border lines of the two countries should be protected. In the same period of time, China established a military base in Wakhan Strait in Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. China has announced that the military forces of this country have settled in Afghanistan only because of the training of the Afghan military forces and the equipment of this base, and this presence will not be permanent (military ytimes.com) As mentioned so far, it is an indication of China's willingness to be present in security fields. As mentioned, so far there is no sign of China's willingness to be present in the security areas of Afghanistan beyond securing the common borders to ward off the threat of extremists. Despite the fact that China has the ability to influence the eastern parts of Afghanistan due to its influence on Pakistan, it is one of the few countries that have retained a certain level of relations with the Taliban in the past two decades.

Also, the creation of "(Mountain Brigade)" in Wakhan can be a good example in this field. It seems that China is taking a very calculated step and will not enter any field before making sure that the conditions are suitable, especially the security sector, which undoubtedly includes the fight against the Taliban (Bokhari, 2019, p. 2). Because of the failure it will cause the Taliban to become enmity and increase the possibility of the Turkestan movement being supported by the Taliban and other extremist groups (militarytimes.com, 2019). China's most important security concern for Afghanistan is the creation of a safe base for Uyghurs in Afghanistan with the aim of attacking China. Therefore, China has taken several measures in

the past years, and the border between China and Afghanistan in the Wakhan Strait is one of the most secure border lines of China.

China has made many efforts to protect its border lines with Afghanistan, an example of which is China's promise of \$85 million aid (December 2017) to the Afghan army to create the (Mountain Brigade) with the aim of protecting the border lines. Rosi is from China and Afghanistan (Ariana news.af.)

Also, the establishment of the Badakhshan base and the establishment of a (four-way)coordination and cooperation mechanism with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan are among these things. China has built a joint military base in Badakhshan with the aim of strengthening anti-terrorist cooperation with Afghanistan.

The construction of this base started in 2018 after speculations regarding the withdrawal of American forces and the power vacuum in this country became serious. The agreement on the construction of this base was reached after the visit of the Afghan delegation led by Tarek Shah Bahrami, the Minister of Defense of Afghanistan (enews.fergananews.com). In the meeting between Tariq Shah and (General Chang Wanquan), his Chinese counterpart, it was decided that the two countries should have military and security cooperation at a high level to fight extremism in Badakhshan province and throughout the northern regions of Afghanistan. The General of the Government, Minister of the members of this committee, announced that China will accept all the technical and armament costs related to this base. (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 6). One of the goals of creating this base is to counter the independence movement of (East Turkestan).

The bases of the East Turkestan independence movement are located in Afghanistan, and China is worried about the likelihood of a connection between this group and the Uyghurs. The Chinese authorities believe that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda give military and ideological training to the Uighur fighters (Kemel Toktomushev, 2018, p. 3). China's high sensitivity towards the East Turkestan movement can be seen in China's official request to Pakistan in June 2014 based on the attack on Taliban positions in North Wazir Province. China believed that during that period of time, the Taliban hosted some leaders of the Turkestan movement. (mei.edu). The security concern about the withdrawal of American forces based on the previously announced plan of the pulling out of American forces from Afghanistan will continue until September. As the monitoring of developments in Tir-Jari shows, this withdrawal has reduced the desire of the Taliban to accompany the peace process to a minimum.

The signs of this transformation were already obvious. In this framework, we can refer to the United Nations report regarding the 30 percent increase in civilian deaths in the first quarter

of 2021 (unama.unmissions.org, 2021). In this context, it is significant to look at regional actors who are influential and influenced by the developments in Afghanistan. According to the official approach, China's priority towards Afghanistan is as follows:

1. The main priority is to achieve peace in Afghanistan, under the shadow of which the development of infrastructure and security can be provided.

2. With the withdrawal of foreign forces, the future of Afghanistan should be in the hands of all Afghan forces in an all-round political structure with maximum and peaceful participation.

3. Strengthening development does not guarantee the end of the conflict in Afghanistan, and in order to create lasting peace, priority should be given to reconstruction and development, which will end poverty, drug trade, insecurity and immigration in this country.

4. The responsible withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan should be conducted in a manner that avoids disruption to the existing order in Afghanistan and the broader region (foreignpolicy.com).

Turning Afghanistan into a safe haven for Uyghurs and connecting extremism on either sides of the border is the most unfavorable scenario for the Chinese authorities. Therefore, they have accepted the responsibility of training and equipping the border forces of Afghanistan in the border of the two countries. From the diplomatic point of view, China supports the reconciliation process in Afghanistan; But he does not leave his fate in the hands of accidents and by accepting the role and position of the Taliban in the future of Afghanistan, he hosted informal meetings between the Taliban and the representatives of the Afghan government and attended public meetings of senior Taliban leaders such as Mullah Abdul Ghani. Rader has received the head of the Taliban office in Doha, Qatar. Finally, in June 2019, Lu Kang, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, announced the meeting of the Taliban delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Brother from China. The discovery of China's spy network in Kabul showed that, from one aspect, this country does not trust the Afghan politicians, especially the Tajiks, and from the other aspect, the power and will of the Pakistani government to control the connection between the Uyghurs and the Taliban. Based the report of the Afghan security forces, a Chinese network was discovered in late 2020, which was conducting intelligence and operational activities in this country.

After the news of the arrest of 10 to 13 Chinese citizens in Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani tried to manage the media in order to prevent the raise of tension in the relations among the two countries. It is said that these people tried to infiltrate the Haqqani network with the support of Pakistan's intelligence service and collect information about the extent of Uyghurs' influence and cooperation with extremists in Afghanistan. (Shishir Gupta, 2021, p. 2).If we accept this

scenario that China has established a relationship with the Haqqani network and the Taliban based on a specific program, it is possible to accept the assumption raised by various Afghan sources about the extensive relationship between China and the Taliban.

A decade after the massacre of Chinese pedestrians, this country hosted the Taliban group in Beijing and proposed a group of three, consisting of China, Pakistan and the Taliban.(Ca - Labrese, 2021, p. 4). The security approach to Afghanistan's developments is an acceptable option for all regional actors, but Beijing's silent investment approach in Afghanistan is not desirable to many actors, especially the United States. In November 2020, Alice Wells, Deputy Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs of the United States, strongly criticized China's role in Afghanistan. He said that China does not spend any significant financial aid for the development of infrastructure and establishing security in Afghanistan and demands a security commitment from America. While Beijing gets a lot of profit from its presence in mining projects in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

China, as its eastern neighbor, considers itself a facilitator in Afghanistan's developments and tries to keep itself in a safe margin. Despite the obvious differences and conflict of interests with the United States, Beijing has always supported Washington's policy in the developments in Afghanistan and has chosen a policy of calculated indifference. This policy gives rise to many speculations regarding China's overt and hidden approaches. China's strategy towards Afghanistan is based on the concept of security and economy. At the same time, China recognizes the Taliban as a "political power" that cannot be ignored. China, as an economic actor, needs stability and an end to the conflict in order to achieve its economic benefits in Afghanistan. It seems that China's economic and security motives have pushed it towards increasing the level of interaction and presence in Afghanistan. China's motivations towards Afghanistan are examined on the two levels of Afghanistan itself and Afghanistan as a piece of a bigger puzzle. Afghanistan is the pending part of China's big economic plan, and if China is successful in linking Afghanistan to Central Asia and Pakistan, and connecting Afghanistan to Iran and from there to the Middle East and Europe, a big part of China's dream of leadership is on its way. Regional passes and in its continuation Geopolitical dominance will be achieved. Also, Afghanistan is unstable for China, which means increasing security risks in the west of this country and hindering the advancement of its economic ambitions. The success of the New Silk Road project lies in the region's stability, especially in Central Asia, where the expansion of the crisis level in Afghanistan greatly increases the possibility of spreading insecurity to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Therefore: China's presence in infrastructure and

stabilization projects in Afghanistan with the aim of changing the world image of this country and showing its responsibility towards the surrounding developments through the policy of neutrality is calculated as a strategic partnership. The strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan poses special challenges for China to strengthen relations with Afghanistan.

1. Pakistan hosts extremist groups such as the Taliban.

2. The tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3. Pakistan's desire to connect to Central Asia and its threat from Afghanistan will lead to China being caught in the middle between Afghanistan and Pakistan and ultimately Beijing's interests will be effective in both countries. The presence of Uyghur militias in the rural areas of Pakistan and the southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan and their cooperation with participating groups under the Taliban group seriously raise two doubts.

1. In the event of the end of the conflict in Afghanistan (regardless of the outcome), will the Uyghur militias have the ability to form a consensus to unite these groups against the Chinese government and liberate the Asami regions in the west of this country.

2. The material and moral support of extremist groups of Uyghurs and the return of equipped and trained Uyghur troops to China.

China has not been able to turn Afghanistan into one of the main members of the Shanghai Pact. Therefore, it has become difficult to create a regional consensus to solve the crisis in Afghanistan under the leadership of China. Also, China failed in the quadripartite mechanism to create a regional axis for participation in solving the Afghanistan problem. This question is seriously raised, in case of the expansion of the crisis in Afghanistan, in what form will Chinese military and security forces enter Afghanistan. By observing the regional developments and examining the macro approaches of this country, it seems that this will happen in two ways.

1. Afra Tograi connection on both sides of the border between China and Afghanistan.

2. Contagion of crisis and insecurity to South and Central Asia.

Regarding the possible entry of Chinese military forces beyond its borders, there are several speculations, the strongest of which is cooperation with the United Nations and the formation of a regional organization in an obvious way and the use of Pakistan's military and intelligence capabilities. Considering the fear of the connection of Taliban and ISIS extremism with the Uyghur protesters and its impact on China's economic grand plan and the strategic relations between China and Pakistan, Beijing seems to create axes centered on Pakistan for a solution. And the administration supports the issue of Afghanistan. Among those, we can refer to the following cases: China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; China, Russia and Pakistan; China, America, Pakistan and Afghanistan; China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan. In the case of China's

superiority over the region in the nonexistence of the United States, it seems that with the connection of the CPEC plan to this country, China's geopolitical encirclement of South and Central Asia will reach its critical point.

In the event of peace in Afghanistan or the formation of a new and wide-ranging system in this country, the following scenarios can be described for China:

1. The reduction of China's concern about the connection between Chinese extremism and Taliban extremism.
2. The integration of Afghanistan in the grand scheme of China.

In this scenario, the success of the strategic agreement between Iran and China and the joining of Afghanistan to China's regional plans can give the impression that the Chinese railway will reach from Afghanistan to Iran and then from Turkey to Eastern Europe. And this means the recognition of one of the most important Chinese dreams.

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