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Afghanistan's Wealth and Geopolitical Significance: Drivers of Ongoing Intervention

The intricate web of strategic games and the vested interests of foreign players in Afghanistan often defy easy comprehension. For instance, Pakistan has consistently sought a larger share of foreign aid and grants. To this end, they have utilized Afghan terrorist groups taught in the Deobandi Religious schools.

On the other hand, some countries, motivated by their own interests, have even temporarily supported their rivals and geopolitical foes, with Iran being a notable example. In Washington's case, its approach to the Taliban has taken a surprising turn, aiming to strengthen its position and maintain its achievements, especially in Central Asia. This shift in strategy, however, inadvertently hastened the fall of Kabul and the subsequent collapse of political governance in Afghanistan.

In the current scenario, it is crucial to recognize that Iran, according to reliable reports, continues to provide military assistance to the Taliban. Their objective is to sustain the fight against Washington. The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, especially after the resurgence of the Taliban, share a common interest in maintaining stability along their borders.

Iran, for instance, actively seeks to participate in the construction of a railway connecting to China through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Pakistan's relations with our country have not been friendly from the outset, but they persisted until the escape of Ashraf Ghani.

Pakistan has historically been a military-political partner of the United States in South Asia and the Middle East. However, due to its unique characteristics, Pakistan faces internal political challenges in the current context. The presence of armed religious fundamentalist groups in remote mountainous regions, beyond central governance control, poses a significant challenge. Nevertheless, Pakistan, with a stable border adjacent to Afghanistan, continues to interfere in Afghan affairs.

The recent events can be cited as an example. The summary of events that happened two days ago shows that Pakistan is reeling after suicide bomb blast explosions during religious gatherings that took place in Mastung in the southwest province of Baluchistan, killed dozens of people and wounded many others. In a separate attack, at least five people were killed at a mosque in Hangu in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. No armed group has claimed responsibility so far. (11) This is an indication that the flame which Pakistan ignited in Afghanistan by the extremist groups, headed by Taliban is out of the control of Pakistan and its historical supporters. The incidents show a boomerang of what Pakistan has been doing for years against Afghanistan.

Pakistan enjoys amicable relations and interactions with Turkey, another Islamic country in the region. This reduces the risk of direct confrontation with the Taliban. While Pakistan is often seen as a patron of the Taliban, it also, directly, and indirectly, supports the United States as a key ally in their 'dirty wars.' By exerting control over Afghan territories, Pakistan can monitor China, Iran, and, if necessary, disrupt their trade routes and developmental projects in the region. Before the Taliban takeover of Kabul, China officially supported peace negotiations between warring parties in Afghanistan. However, in mid-2021, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, hosted representatives of the Taliban for mediation talks in Beijing. This marked a warming of China's relations with the Taliban. Following the fall of Kabul, Beijing, though cautiously, maintained a friendly posture. The Taliban leadership recognizes China as a 'primary partner' and 'gateway to entry.' However, China is concerned about the impact of the Taliban's success on the members of the 'East Turkestan Islamic Movement' in its autonomous Uighur region. China is also keen to complete infrastructure projects, including the construction of alternative routes like the one through the Wakhan Corridor. China, as a new major power competing with the United States, has adopted a unique approach, particularly in international events, diverging from the actions and positions of the United States. The current situation clearly suggests that, in the present circumstances, it is Beijing, not Washington, that is

setting the agenda, making plans, and shaping the future of the geopolitical region.

Afghanistan is rich in mineral resources, coal reserves, and valuable metals such as lithium, beryllium, sulphur, marble, gold, and more. Additionally, there are known oil and natural gas reserves, as well as gypsum deposits. Notably, significant lithium reserves have been discovered, and Afghanistan's vast iron and copper reserves could position it as one of the world's leading producers of these metals.

Afghanistan with its vast resources and untapped potential, has consistently been a focal point for major global powers, leading to various forms of invasion and intervention in Afghan affairs. One of the pivotal global events at the dawn of the 21st century was the tragic incident of September 11, 2001, when extensive attacks targeted the economic, political, and military heart of the United States of America. **The events of September 2001 served as a catalyst, justifying a pretext for the United States and over 54 other nations to unite in a coalition for intervention in Afghanistan. Superpowers like the United States, along with their allies, viewed this as an opportunity to secure a strong foothold in the realm of global power and wealth in the contemporary era.**

Since 2013, China's leadership has made a significant impact on the world stage by championing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the "project of the century." More than 150 countries have joined the BRI, with hundreds of agreements signed. The initiative was unveiled by General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and paramount leader Xi Jinping in September and October 2013 during visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia. It was subsequently promoted by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during state visits to Asia and Europe.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road, stands as one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived. Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, this vast collection of development and investment initiatives was originally designed to connect East Asia and Europe through physical infrastructure. Over the past decade, the project has expanded to encompass Africa, Oceania, and Latin America, significantly expanding China's economic and political influence.

While some analysts perceive the BRI as an unsettling extension of China's growing power, and the rising costs of many projects have garnered opposition in some countries, the United States shares the concern of some Asian nations that the BRI could serve as a Trojan horse for China-led regional development and military expansion. President Joe Biden has maintained the sceptical stance of his

predecessors towards Beijing's actions, though Washington has grappled with presenting participating governments a more enticing economic vision.

A pivotal meeting convened with representatives and leaders from ten prominent countries worldwide under the auspices of the 'New Silk Road' initiative in China. While the presence of European leaders was somewhat subdued, it notably included figures such as Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey. China's overarching goal was to rekindle the ancient trade routes connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa under this initiative.

President Xi Jinping of China articulated during this gathering, 'In this era of interdependence among nations and persistent global threats, no single nation possesses the capacity and capability to tackle these global challenges in isolation. Regrettably, Western concerns regarding the connectivity of this transit route and the potential impact on their own interests have contributed to instability in northern Afghanistan, contemporary Iran, and other nations along the Silk Road.'

Given these intricate global dynamics, I have embarked on documenting 'Twenty Years of Afghanistan,' an extensive chronicle encompassing the nation's history of interventions, particularly post-September 11, 2001. This endeavour is intended for those with a keen interest in history and politics. 'Twenty Years of Afghanistan' may well become the primary resource for uncovering the intricacies of peace and turmoil in Afghanistan, where numerous inconspicuous events often elude recognition. In Afghanistan, life unfolds much like anywhere else in the world, where events hold the reins, steering the course of existence and, at times, abruptly halting it. These events, often beyond the control of individuals, originate externally and permeate the fabric of the nation, emblematic of Afghanistan's enduring conundrum.

Upon conducting an initial search, one is inundated with harrowing military events when searching the keyword 'Afghanistan.' A United Nations report, amid the celebrations of nations, reveals that Afghanistan occupied the lowest rung among various countries globally in the year 2021, bearing testimony to a grim and unsettling reality. Hence, the question arises: What series of actions in recent years have precipitated Afghanistan's current predicament? It is plausible that an answer to this question may lie in revisiting the events of two decades ago, marking the onset of Afghanistan's tumultuous journey. In September 2001, former President of the United States, George Bush, sought a fresh perspective on a deeply concerning situation, reminiscent of the past year.

On that fateful day, four suicide attacks involving passenger planes occurred, at 9:00 a.m. at the Pentagon and at 01:01 a.m. in Pennsylvania, resulting in explosions and plane crashes. President Bush unequivocally asserted the identity of the perpetrators: 'The evidence we have meticulously compiled all points to an amalgamation of terrorist organizations collectively known as Al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden.'

Former Senator Bob Graham of Florida, who chaired the committee investigating the September 11, 2001, operation, subsequently released a comprehensive report. This report provides an executive account of these terrorist operations, extending through the year after. It is well-known that Pakistan serves as a haven for various terrorist's organisations that are subsequently dispatched to other countries. These groups receive financial support from Arab countries and re overseen by the US and its close allies. Regrettably it is the people of Afghanistan who bear the brunt of this cruel game orchestrated by large powers. Such injustice casts a dark shadow over the world's affairs, highlighting the complexities and consequences of global dynamics. Taliban administration in Afghanistan poses numerous challenges due to its controversial and illegitimate takeover of power, as well as widespread discontent among the Afghan population.

Some of the major challenges include:

Legitimacy and International Isolation: The Taliban's seizure of power was widely seen as illegitimate, leading to their isolation in the international community. Many countries and international organizations refuse to recognize their clergy Pashtun dominated administration. This isolation has severe economic and diplomatic consequences for Afghanistan.

Security Challenges: The Taliban face ongoing security challenges from various insurgent groups and militias. Groups like ISIS-Khorasan Province continue to carry out attacks in the country. Additionally, the Taliban's efforts to consolidate power have led to localized conflicts and resistance movements in some regions.

Resistance Movements: In response to the Taliban's rule, some Afghans have formed resistance movements, including the National Resistance Front (NRF) in the Panjshir Valley. These groups pose a challenge to the Taliban's authority and control over the country.

Governance and Services: The Taliban's ability to provide basic services, maintain infrastructure, and govern effectively is unproven and faces scepticism from many Afghans who remember their harsh rule in the 1990s.

Public Discontent: Widespread public discontent and protests the Taliban's rule highlight the challenges of governing population that largely rejects their ideology and restrictions on personal freedoms.

News Outlets: Reputable international news organizations like the BBC, Reuters, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Al Jazeera regularly report on developments in Afghanistan. Their websites and news archives are valuable resources for up-to-date information.

Human Rights Watch: Human Rights Watch publishes reports and updates on human rights abuses and challenges in Afghanistan. Their website is a good source for information on the Taliban's rule and its impact on human rights.

Amnesty International: Amnesty International monitors human rights violations worldwide, including in Afghanistan. Their reports and publications provide insights into the situation in the country.

United Nations: The United Nations, through its various agencies and missions, provides updates and reports on the humanitarian and security situation in Afghanistan. You can find these reports on the official UN website. Think Tanks and Research Institutions: Organizations like the International Crisis Group, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies often publish analyses and reports on Afghanistan's political and security challenges.

Academic Journals: Scholarly journals in fields like international relations, political science, and Middle Eastern studies frequently publish articles and analyses on Afghanistan. JSTOR and academic databases are good places to search for such articles.

Government Statements: Official statements and reports from governments and international organizations, such as the U.S. Department of State and NATO, can provide insights into their perspectives on Afghanistan's challenges.

Some extra references for the information mentioned in the article:

1. **The Great Game Unfolding in Afghanistan: Geopolitical Manoeuvres and Resource Riches:** This section discusses the complex geopolitical dynamics in Afghanistan.
2. **Pakistan's Role:** Information about Pakistan's efforts to secure foreign aid and its use of Afghan terrorist groups can be referenced

through various news articles and reports on Pakistan's foreign policy.

3. **Iran's Support for the Taliban:** Reports on Iran's support for the Taliban and its geopolitical interests in Afghanistan can be found in news articles and research papers.
4. **Washington's Changing Approach:** Information about Washington's evolving strategy in Afghanistan can be referenced through news reports and official statements from the U.S. government.
5. **China's Involvement:** China's involvement in Afghanistan, its support for peace negotiations, and its concerns about the Taliban's impact on its Xinjiang region can be sourced from news articles and China's official statements.
6. **Afghanistan's Resource Wealth:** details about Afghanistan's mineral resources, coals, metals, oils, and natural gas reserves can be found in geological surveys and reports from organisations like the U.S geological survey.
7. **The Impact of 9/11:** Information about the events of September 11, 2001, and their impact on the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan can be referenced through official government reports and historical accounts.
8. **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** Details about China's BRI can be sourced from official documents and statements from the Chinese government, as well as reports from international organizations.
9. **Taliban Administration Challenges:** Information about the challenges posed by the Taliban administration can be found in news reports and analyses from reputable news outlets and research institutions.
10. **References to News Outlets and Organizations:** Information about news outlets, human rights organizations, think tanks, academic journals, and government statements can be referenced by visiting their respective websites and publications.
11. <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/liveblog/2023/Pakistan-blast-live-news-52-killed-in-balochistan-religious-procession>