



China's Interests in Afghanistan

Why in News

Recently, following the [withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan](#), China has emerged as one of the first nations to develop diplomatic channels with the Taliban. This engagement emanates from **China's economic and security interest in Afghanistan**.



Key Points

▪ About China's Economic Interest in Afghanistan:

- **Reserves of Lithium:** Afghanistan is probably home to what may be the world's **largest reserves of lithium**.
 - Lithium is the **key ingredient of the large-capacity lithium-ion batteries** that are widely used in electric vehicles and the renewable energy industry.
 - China dominates **Lithium-Ion Battery Production worldwide** and it may seek long-term a contract with the Taliban to develop **Afghanistan's massive**

untapped lithium reserves in return for mining rights and ownership arrangements.

- **Mineral Deposits:** Afghanistan is sitting on **mineral deposits estimated to be worth up to \$3 trillion.**
 - Afghanistan is rich in several resources such as gold, oil, bauxite, rare earths, chromium, copper, natural gas, uranium, coal, iron ore, lead, zinc, gemstones, talc, sulphur, travertine, gypsum and marble.
- **China's Belt and Road Initiative:** China's strategic **[Belt-and-Road Initiative](#)** (BRI) could get more reach if it is able to extend the initiative from Pakistan to Afghanistan, with a **Peshawar-to-Kabul motorway.**
 - This would create a much shorter land route for faster and convenient access to markets in the Middle East for Chinese goods.
- **About China's Security Interest in Afghanistan:**
 - According to the **[UN security council](#)**, the **East Turkestan Islamic Movement** (ETIM) had roots in Afghanistan as it received support from the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the 2000s.
 - ETIM is an **Uyghur Islamic extremist organisation** founded in Western China with the aim to establish an independent state called **East Turkestan in the place of Xinjiang.**
 - Thus, ETIM poses a direct threat to **China's national security and territorial integrity.**
 - China is worried that Afghanistan could become a **potential haven for the Uyghur extremist group**, which could retaliate against the widespread repression of Uyghurs.
- **Impact of China-Taliban Engagement on India:**
 - A new route of BRI through Kabul would render **India's reluctance to join BRI less consequential.**
 - With China-Taliban engagement, there can be formation of a new regional **geopolitical axis between China-Pakistan-Taliban**, which may go against the interests of India.
 - China's stronghold in Afghanistan will also hamper connectivity projects to Central Asia via Afghanistan. For example, **[Chabahar Port](#), [International North South Transport Corridor \(INSTC\)](#), [TAPI Pipeline](#).**

Way Forward

- **India Engaging with the Taliban:** Talking to Taliban would allow India to seek security guarantees from the insurgents in return for continued development assistance.
 - India can also persuade the Taliban to explore the possibility of its autonomy from Pakistan.
- **Fighting Global Terrorism:** There is a need for the global community to fight against the global concern of terrorism.
 - In this context, it high time to adopt the **[Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism](#)** (proposed by India at UN in 1996).

[Source: IE](#)