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AFGHANISTAN WATCH

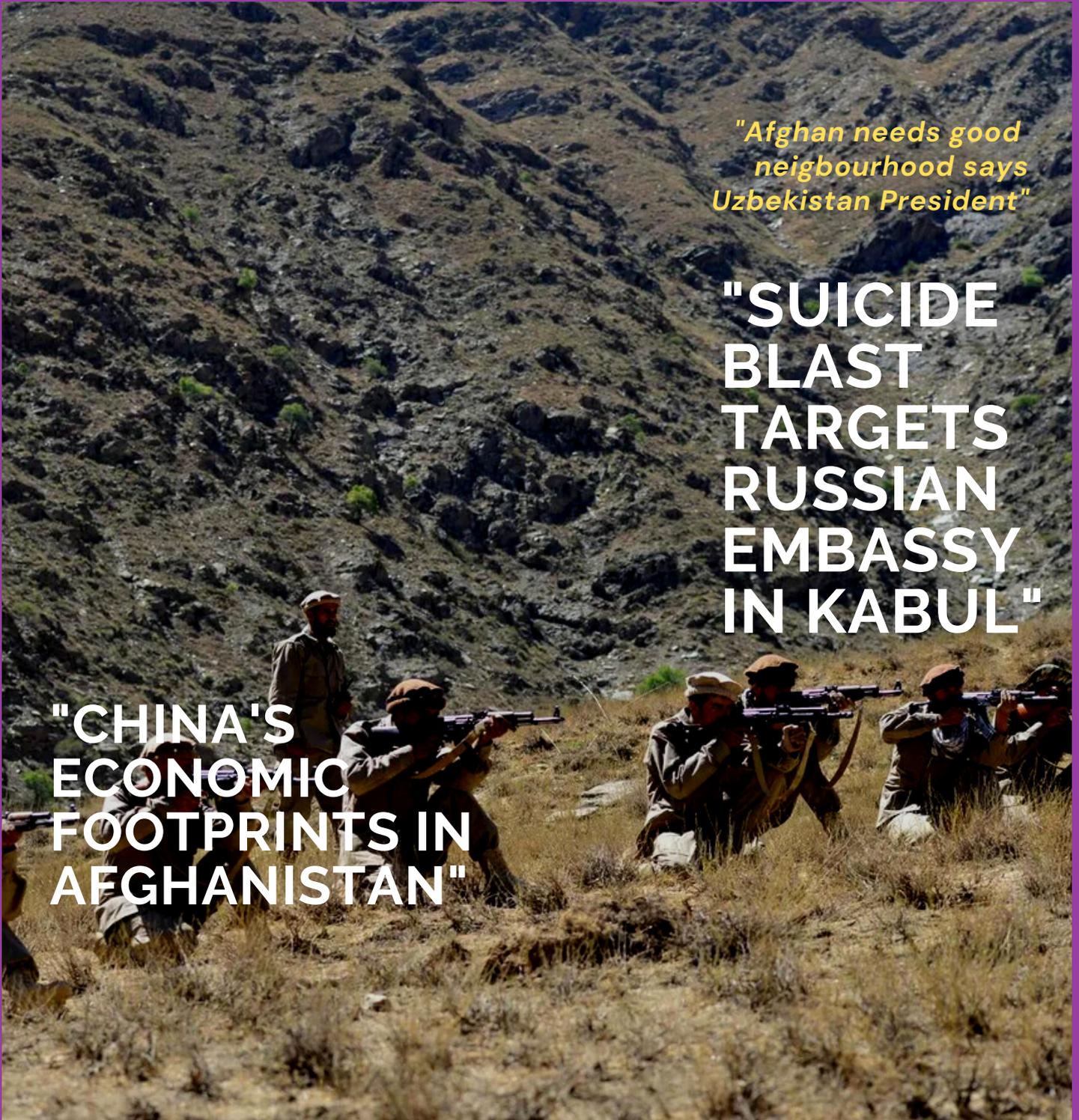
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*"Afghan needs good
neighbourhood says
Uzbekistan President"*

**"SUICIDE
BLAST
TARGETS
RUSSIAN
EMBASSY
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**"CHINA'S
ECONOMIC
FOOTPRINTS IN
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Afghanistan: Suicide Blast Targets Russian Embassy in Kabul; Two Diplomats Among At least 20 Dead

<https://www.freepressjournal.in/world/afghanistan-suicide-blast-targets-russian-embassy-in-kabul-two-diplomats-among-at-least-20-dead>

The RIA Novosti news agency said explosion went off when a Russian diplomat came out to people waiting outside to call out the names of candidates for visas. Citing Moscow's Foreign Ministry, the agency later reported that two members of the embassy staff were killed.

Khalid Zadran, a spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said at least one civilian was killed and that 10 others were wounded. He said a suicide attacker tried to detonate a bomb in the crowd, but was identified by security forces who shot him. It was not immediately clear if he was able to detonate the explosives.

"The suicide attacker before reaching the target, was recognised and shot by Russian embassy (Taliban) guards ... there is no information about casualties yet," Mawlawi Sabir, the head of the police district where the attack took place, told Reuters.



Comments

It is important to note that Russia hasn't evacuated its embassy in Kabul and its ambassador continues to engage with Taliban. But even then, Russia hasn't formally recognised it which reflects that there is no rush, and it will continue to engage in dialogues with the top leadership at Kabul. That said, Moscow fears of regional instability if Taliban fails to effectively neutralise the threat of ISK-P. Challenged on the Eastern Front, Moscow can hope for Taliban to keep a lid on this threat and will refrain to alter its policy until Taliban's hard measures of Sharia spills outside its boundaries.

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India strongly condemned the terrorist attack on the Russian Embassy and conveyed condolences to the families of the victims. India must continue to engage with neighbourhood stakeholders/Central Asian Republics through dialogues such as the on-going SCO meeting in Samarkand, in an effort to engage with Kabul multilaterally and discuss processes for regional stability and peace.

China's Economic Footprint Steadily Expanding Across Afghanistan

<https://theprint.in/world/chinas-economic-footprint-steadily-expanding-across-afghanistan/111211/>

China is focusing firmly on business and cultural diplomacy to expand its economic footprint across Afghanistan. It is also sparing no effort to promote and support the Taliban, which finds itself in near diplomatic isolation. It is towards this end that China is walking the extra mile to offer a helping hand to the Taliban regime firstly in the matter of travel ban exemptions for Islamic Emirate leaders, and secondly in grappling with its economic and humanitarian crisis. It has provided eight million US dollars' worth of assistance to families affected by the recent earthquake, according to Global Times.

Comments

It will not be incorrect to say that China, in the context of engaging with Kabul, is facing both opportunities and challenges.

From an investment perspective China is keen to implement suburban development model for Kabul suburbs under the initiative of a very first Sino-Afghan joint venture with a USD 216 million. Besides this, it has exempted 98 per cent of its Afghan imports from import duties. China Metallurgical Group is readying its experts to excavate the Aynak copper mine. What must alarm New Delhi is the China's new push in the context of cultural diplomacy by deputing scholars to help protect cultural heritage in Afghanistan. It has identified the historical relics at the Mes Aynak copper mine (Logar province) and the UNESCO heritage site, Bamyan Valley and has taken the sites on a fresh lease after preliminary scientific research conducted by a joint team of Afghan and Chinese archaeologists. For New Delhi, China's economic influence is lesser a problem than its on-going initiatives to protect Afghans cultural heritage. With civilisational ties, India must employ initiatives to strengthen cultural relations and must revise Afghan's historical connect by assisting Kabul in preserving such monuments or relics and stand tall in the context of its policy on 'people to people connectivity'.

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From a security perspective, China's dual policy initiatives (economic & culture) points towards its willingness to keep Taliban unified, if the Taliban disintegrates it may have a spill over effect in Xinjiang and BRI for China. Beijing understands the Taliban's need to rebuild a new Afghanistan which time and again has openly called Beijing for support in the context of economic development. But how far China will use its leverage over the Taliban to gain concessions in mining and exploration and persuade if need be or coerce the Taliban to cut ties with terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda and ETIM, is yet to be seen. Although China has spoken of Afghanistan as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and some trade in the form of export of Afghan pine nuts to China and the construction of a fibreoptic cable down the Wakhan Corridor to help Afghanistan get on the internet, is seen with positivity in and around Badakhshan.

Russia's military weakness and China's security fears in in the light of frequent attacks by the IS-K, could push Beijing to become more involved in security matters in the region.

Uzbekistan President: Afghans Need 'Good Neighbours', Helping Them Moral Obligation

<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/uzbekistan-president-afghans-need-good-neighbours-helping-them-moral-obligation-8147341/>

Invoking the "Samarkand spirit" ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit to be held on September 14 and 15, Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has said that people of Afghanistan need "good neighbours" and called it a "moral obligation" to extend a helping hand and offer them effective ways of overcoming the years-long crisis.



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In an article for The Indian Express published, Mirziyoyev wrote: "Afghanistan that has played for centuries the role of a buffer in the historical confrontations of global and regional powers, should try on a new peaceful mission of connecting Central and South Asia."

Comments

The hosting of SCO meeting in Samarkand not only points towards the Uzbek government's effort to keep Afghanistan on top of the world's attention but also keeps up its hope to maintain positive relationship with Kabul. Tashkent seems to have taken a page from Turkmenistan's foreign policy book of the 1990s as it views Afghanistan as a necessary transit country in plans for a brighter economic future. As a result, it finds it necessary to deal with whoever is in power in Afghanistan, at least so long as there is no threat against Uzbekistan that emanates from Afghanistan. Tashkent has no choice. It is not in the interest for Tashkent to have Taliban as an adversary threatening its national security and compromising future economic prospects.

Tashkent has been a leading electricity supplier to Kabul for the least 15 years. In 2018, the electricity price was reduced by 35%. In accordance to the contract (100 billion) signed between Uzbekistan and IEA, the latter will supply Afghanistan with 2 billion kWh of electricity, capable of providing uninterrupted power supply to over 70% of Afghan hinterlands. This will open up new opportunities in opening enterprises and creating new jobs. Hence, it is in the interest of Uzbekistan to adhere to its position on the Afghan issue, as it has a lot to lose by isolating itself from Afghanistan.

To this end, Tashkent may develop a unified approach in communicating with the new government and help them in building a modern state that meets all international requirements and standards and with India emerging as one of the leading voices in the summit, India must harness this opportunity by engaging in joint humanitarian/development projects and demonstrate India's commitment to the Afghan people.

*Prepared by Mr. Anant Mishra, Associate Fellow,
Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS)*