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AFGHANISTAN WATCH

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Taliban Gives A Warm Welcome To China's New Ambassador To Afghanistan

<https://southasianvoices.org/two-years-after-taliban-takeover-what-is-indias-afghanistan-policy/>

The Taliban on Wednesday welcomed China's new ambassador to Afghanistan, with Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi saying the nomination of Zhao Sheng was a "significant step with a significant message". The Taliban's chief spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, told The Associated Press news agency that it is tradition for new ambassadors to present their credentials to the head of the country. "It also signals to other countries to come forward and interact with the Islamic Emirate," Mujahid said referring to the name of the Taliban administration.

Comments

It is the first time since the Taliban takeover in 2021 that an ambassador to Kabul has been afforded such lavish protocol, with the Afghan officials saying the new envoy's arrival is a sign for other nations to come forward and establish relations with the Taliban-led government. [1]

China is among a handful of countries including Pakistan, Iran and Russia that have maintained a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan since Taliban retook control of the country in 2021. China's foreign ministry said that this is a normal rotation of China's ambassador to Afghanistan, and is intended to continue advancing dialogue and cooperation between China and Afghanistan and that China's policy towards Afghanistan is clear and consistent. [2].

Apart from its attempts to set up a toehold in Afghanistan, China has its economic interests in form of gaining access to the vast Lithium reserves in Afghanistan as also there is likelihood of crude oil exploration by them. Additionally, If China can cultivate good relations with Taliban; it may exercise a better control over the unstable areas of Xinjiang province where the Uyghur people are fleeing due to genocide and crackdown.

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Taliban View & OBOR

The Taliban have high expectations that their growing ties with China will help them shed their pariah status in the eyes of the world community. The Taliban believe their alliance with China will create millions of new employment possibilities in their nation. China wants to expand China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Afghanistan to reach Central Asia. In May, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan vowed to strengthen trilateral ties on security and counterterrorism at a meeting of the three country's foreign ministers in Islamabad and agreed to forge closer economic ties by extending CPEC to Afghanistan. [3]

Impact on International Fraternity

China has made numerous attempts to lobby for the inclusion of the Taliban in the international community, but due to the Taliban's oppressive rule and dismal track record regarding human rights, powerful countries worldwide do not want to have any contact with the organisation. However, China is solely concerned with its own interests, so it has no qualms about shaking hands with the authoritarian rule of the Taliban. [4]

Effects on the North-South Corridor Project

China's close relationship with Afghanistan may also present difficulties for India. Through ambitious initiatives such as constructing the Chabahar Port in adjacent Iran, India is working towards establishing a connection with the countries of Central Asia. China's involvement in Afghanistan may affect other international initiatives, such as India's North-South Corridor. India had begun construction on projects in Afghanistan worth millions of dollars before the Taliban came to power, but those projects have yet to be finished. The government of the Taliban wants India to finish such projects, but China's presence could now affect India's incomplete projects. [5]

Impact on Pakistan

Pakistan may suffer a big blow due to the burgeoning alliance between China and Afghanistan. For a long period, the Taliban were thought of as Pakistan's proxy, but in recent years, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have become strained, leading to skirmishes on the border.

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Source: AP Photo

In the past, China would enter Afghanistan through Pakistan, but now that China has established direct contact with the Taliban, this is not good news for Pakistan. [6]

Afghanistan Headed For Civil War With Taliban Splitting Into...: Ex-Commander

<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/afghanistan-headed-to-a-civil-war-with-taliban-former-afghan-commander-2434506-2023-09-12?onetap=true>

Two years after the US forces abruptly left Kabul, Afghanistan the Taliban is now riddled with factionalism, and the country is fast becoming a safe haven for foreign terrorists. Lt. Gen. Haibatullah Alizai, who was chief of staff for the army at the time the capital city of Kabul fell to the Taliban in August 2021, told PTI in an interview that the situation in Afghanistan is very critical and going in a dangerous direction, because in the last two years, Afghanistan has been controlled by terrorists and it has fallen into terrorist hands.

The number of terrorist organisations in Afghanistan has expanded during the Taliban regime, he said. Al-Qaeda is active, Daish is getting more and more active and a lot of resistance groups are being announced and established against the Taliban regime in different parts, which will of course lead Afghanistan to another serious civil war or possible split (of Afghanistan). [7]

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Comments

The Afghan Civil War with the National Resistance Force's (NRF) campaign against Taliban towards gaining recognition and international support has been covered in detail in **CENJOWS Afghanistan Watch 16-31 August 2023, "Two Years of Taliban 2.0: Takeaways for India"**. In addition, attacks by Daesh/ISIS on Taliban officials, Clergy and mosques have further exacerbated the security situation in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding the above, Taliban are still firmly in charge and despite initial predictions of a civil war, there is no substantial resistance challenging their power, although the nation grapples with an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Its aid-dependent economy has severely contracted but not yet imploded, and while food inflation is declining, it remains a slow-moving train wreck with no apparent long-term solutions in sight.

Yet tragically, for women and those Afghans who want a more inclusive society, the worst-case scenarios have truly unfolded. The international community has cautiously engaged with the new Taliban-led Afghanistan, but without full commitment, resulting in a state of limbo. The Taliban's series of draconian measures have made the lives of Afghans and diplomacy exceedingly challenging. Their latest action was the closure of beauty parlours, one of the few places where women could gather freely outside their homes. [8]

Moscow Format Meeting

<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185094>

The Russian foreign ministry's spokesperson Maria Zakharova announced at a press conference that the next Moscow Format meeting would be held in the city of Kazan. This will be the fifth round of the "Moscow Format" consultative meeting about Afghanistan. Regional countries will discuss the current situation in Afghanistan, including intra-Afghan issues, reconciliation, security and post conflict restoration of the country. [9]



Source: Republic World

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Background

The Moscow Format Meeting, which started in 2017, is a regional security dialogue initiated by Russia. It convenes stakeholder countries with interests in Afghanistan's stability, including Russia, Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The main objective is to foster political reconciliation and address regional security concerns.

Indian Focus

India is set to attend the upcoming Moscow Format meeting on Afghanistan in the city of Kazan, Russia, on September 29, according to ET. New Delhi's primary focus will be on safeguarding its strategic interests and advocating for an inclusive government that upholds the rights of all sections of Afghan society. In the last two decades, India has centred its centuries-old ties with Afghanistan around five pillars, including large infrastructure projects; human resource development and capacity building; humanitarian assistance; community development projects; and enhancing trade and investment through connectivity. [10]

Comments

The meeting would centre on the topic of inclusivity of the current Afghan government, counterterrorism and drug-related crime. The Taliban will also be a participant represented by Amir Khan Muttaqui, the acting Foreign Minister unlike the meeting last November where it was excluded. [11]

Border Skirmish Shuts Crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/border-skirmish-shuts-crossing-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan-13087132.html>

A gun battle erupted on 06 September between Pakistan and Afghan border forces, at Torkham crossing, the busiest for trade and people between the two nations, which share a porous 2,600-kilometre (1,600-mile) frontier. With each side blaming the other for starting the fire fight that shut the trade crossing. "Afghan forces tried to establish a check post in an area where it is agreed... that both sides will not establish a check post," said Pakistan local administration. "After an objection from the Pakistan side, the Afghan forces opened fire," he said, adding that Pakistan border forces responded with "retaliatory fire". The Taliban government in turn blamed Pakistan. The Pakistan side of the border had been at a standstill for days, with markets and offices shut and crowds of travellers sheltering in nearby mosques. Officials said more than 1,300 vehicles, including trucks and trailers, were on the Pakistan side waiting to cross.

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Re-Opening

The Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan reopened to pedestrians and vehicles early Friday, more than a week on 15 September 23. An AFP team on the Afghan side of the border said crowds had gathered in anticipation of crossing to Pakistan, but the gates were still closed. Traders on both sides complained that tons of perishable goods were lost because of the border closure, while Afghan travellers missed vital hospital appointments or flights out of Pakistan.

Comments

The incident has led to souring of already poor relations between Islamabad and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. The border is a constant source of friction between the two nations, with Islamabad frequently complaining that Kabul has failed to secure its frontier – a colonial-era demarcation that every Afghan government has disputed – allowing militants to cross and strike on Pakistan's soil. Afghan authorities have repeatedly denied the allegations [12].

By
Col Ajay Thakur, VSM
Senior Fellow, CENJOWS

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Endnotes

- [1] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/13/taliban-gives-a-warm-welcome-to-chinas-new-ambassador-to-afghanistan>.
- [2] <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/14/china/china-ambassador-afghanistan-taliban-intl-hnk/index.html> - Alex Stambaugh and Helen Regan, CNN September 14, 2023.
- [3] <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/India/china-s-new-mission-in-afghanistan-spells-troubles-for-india-s-interests/ar-AA1gPPgt>.
- [4] ibid
- [5] ibid
- [6] ibid
- [7] <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/afghanistan-headed-to-a-civil-war-with-taliban-former-afghan-commander-2434506-2023-09-12?onetap=true>
- [8] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/19/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-retreat/>
- [9] <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185094>
- [10] <https://www.news18.com/world/india-to-attend-key-afghan-meeting-in-russian-city-of-kazan-next-month-8484049.html>
- [11] <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/india-to-take-part-in-moscow-meet-on-afghanistan-544761>
- [12] <https://www.firstpost.com/world/border-skirmish-shuts-crossing-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan-13087132.html>.