

# The Battle for Afghanistan Aid: Japanese FOIP vs. Chinese BRI

## Preface

Wars in the modern era take many untraditional forms. After two bloody and devastating world wars, humanity lived on the impact of the Cold War between Western capitalism, under the NATO coalition led by the United States, against the international communism, represented by the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union. The fall of the Berlin wall<sup>1</sup>, as a symbolic indication, ended the East-West confrontation with the collapse of the socialist camp, followed by the domination of the US as a unipolar power on the international stage. The East-West confrontation ended with the collapse of the socialist camp, proceeded by the domination of the US as a unipolar power on the international stage.

With the American hegemony over the world after the victory in the Cold War<sup>2</sup>, the Western empire was shocked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001<sup>3</sup>, then the "clash of civilizations"<sup>4</sup> was presented as an inevitable conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West.

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<sup>1</sup> **The Fall of the Berlin Wall:** On November 9, 1989, during the Peaceful Revolution, was a pivotal event in world history that marked the falling of the Iron Curtain and one of the series of events that started the fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, preceded by the Solidarity Movement in Poland. The fall of the inner German border took place shortly afterward. An end to the Cold War was declared at the Malta Summit three weeks later, and German reunification took place in October of the following year.

Abadi, C. (2009). The Berlin Fall. *Foreign Policy*, 173, 128–130. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20684898>

<sup>2</sup> The **Cold War** (1947–1991) was a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as their respective allies, the Western and Eastern Blocs, that began after World War II.

Historians disagree on the exact start and end dates, but the period is generally considered to run from the Truman Doctrine's announcement on March 12, 1947, to the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991.

GARTHOFF, R. L. (1992). Why Did the Cold War Arise, and Why Did It End? *Diplomatic History*, 16(2), 287–293. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24912158>

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins, B. M. & others. (2011). Introduction: The Shadow of 9/11 Across America. In B. M. Jenkins & J. P. Godges (Eds.), *The Long Shadow of 9/11: America's Response to Terrorism* (pp. 1–8). RAND Corporation.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1107rc.5>

<sup>4</sup> The **Clash of Civilizations** is the theory of Samuel P. Huntington that cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. According to American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, future wars will be fought not between countries, but between cultures. It was first proposed in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, and then expanded upon in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article titled "The Clash of Civilizations?"

Samuel P. Huntington. (2022, May 27). *The clash of civilizations?* *Foreign Affairs*.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>

During the twenty-first century, the world witnessed the so-called “war on terror”<sup>5</sup>, as the US invaded several Islamic countries after the international stage had been set for revenge after the September 11 attacks<sup>6</sup>. The first target was Afghanistan<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 1 - American operations against Al Qaeda

<sup>5</sup> **Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)** is an ongoing international military campaign initiated by the United States following the September 11 attacks. The targets of the campaign are primarily Islamic terrorist groups, with prominent targets including al-Qaeda and DAIESH.

Buzan, B. (2006). Will the “Global War on Terrorism” Be the New Cold War? *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 82(6), 1101–1118. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4122087>

<sup>6</sup> Holloway, D. (2008). *9/11 and the War on Terror*. Edinburgh University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r1xbz>

<sup>7</sup> Veit, R. (2002). Afghanistan: War on Terror / War in Error? *AQ: Australian Quarterly*, 74(4), 7–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20638100>

On October 7, 2001, the U.S. military, with mainly British reinforcement, began a bombing campaign against Taliban forces, officially launching Operation Enduring Freedom<sup>8</sup>. Australia, Canada, and France have joined, while Japan and Germany have pledged future assistance<sup>9</sup>. Tokyo never sent military forces to Afghanistan, but it has been a major provider of infrastructure development aid during the US presence there.

After two decades of fierce guerrilla warfare, the U.S. military departed Kabul on August 30, a day ahead of schedule, ending a 20-year occupation and leaving Afghanistan in the Taliban's hands<sup>10</sup>.

Meanwhile, Chinese government officials expressed hope that the Taliban will establish a political structure that will help in the establishment of long-term peace in Afghanistan, stating that Beijing has "maintained contact and communication with the Taliban" and that China intends to "play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction." On the other hand, China's regional and international rivals are watching to see whether Beijing can extend its sphere of influence by building ties with a new extremist regime in Afghanistan.

As for Japan, it will keep a close eye on the Chinese government's initiatives, after Beijing functionally accepted the Taliban's overthrow of the previous pro-American Afghan government.

The logical question is whether China intends to keep expanding its sphere of influence by providing generous amounts of foreign aid to the Taliban, which might make Afghanistan increasingly reliant on Chinese dominance.

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<sup>8</sup> **Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)** was the official name used by the U.S. government for the Global War on Terrorism. On October 7, 2001, in response to the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush announced that airstrikes targeting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban had begun in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom primarily refers to the War in Afghanistan, but it was also affiliated with counterterrorism operations in other countries, such as OEF-Philippines and OEF-Trans Sahara.

Collins, B. (2002). Operation Enduring Freedom and the Future of NATO. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 3(2), 51–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43134050>

<sup>9</sup> The Coalition Information Center. (2001). *The global War on Terrorism: The first 100 days*. U.S. Department of State Archive. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.htm>

<sup>10</sup> David Zucchino. (2021, October 7). *The U.S. war in Afghanistan: How it started, and how it ended*. The New York Times - Breaking News, US News, World News and Videos. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/afghanistan-war-us.html>

## 1- The Japanese Aid to Afghanistan during the American Occupation

At a time when China is negotiating with the new rulers of Kabul<sup>11</sup>, whether directly or through their mutual friend, Pakistan, the Taliban was seeking to expand its alternatives by opening the lines of communication with Japan, which has had a role in the past twenty years in supporting the Afghan people. The Islamic movement's spokesman, Suhail Shaheen<sup>12</sup>, had an interview with the Japanese Kyodo Agency<sup>13</sup>, where he emphasized that "the Taliban wants Japan to participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan", and that there is a quest for "Japanese cooperation in various fields."

This friendly approach is based on the fact that Japan has already contributed 68 billion dollars to the international efforts for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, as well as supporting the medical, agricultural, and educational sectors in rural areas<sup>14</sup>. In fact, Tokyo was scheduled to donate \$122 million this year (2021) to support humanitarian activities on Afghan soil<sup>15</sup>.

Japan alongside India, Australia, and the United States, is the founder of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific FOIP Initiative<sup>16</sup>. Tokyo introduced its vision of regional cooperation based on common values of democracy, freedom, and respect for human

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<sup>11</sup> Asim Kashgarian. (2021, August 20). *China's outreach to Taliban draws mixed reactions*. VOA. <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/chinas-outreach-taliban-draws-mixed-reactions>

<sup>12</sup> **Muhammad Suhail Shaheen** is a Taliban leader who is currently the movement spokesman at the Political Office in Doha. He edited the English-language, state-owned Afghan newspaper *The Kabul Times* during the first Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996–2001), before being appointed to Afghanistan's Embassy in Pakistan as a deputy ambassador.

F.P. (2021, September 22). *Meet Suhail Shaheen: Taliban's 'soft-spoken, calm' spokesperson named as UN envoy*. Firstpost. <https://www.firstpost.com/world/meet-suhail-shaheen-talibans-soft-spoken-calm-spokesperson-named-as-un-envoy-9986771.html>

<sup>13</sup> NEWS, K. (2021, August 24). *Taliban wants to maintain good relations with Japan: Spokesman*. Kyodo News+. <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/08/4b12e6edd948-taliban-wants-to-maintain-good-relations-with-japan-spokesman.html>

<sup>14</sup> Walia, S. (2020, March 24). *Securing peace in Afghanistan: A primer on Japan's role*. ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/securing-peace-in-afghanistan-a-primer-on-japans-role-63634/>

<sup>15</sup> Khaama Press. (2021, February 1). *Japan approves millions of dollars in aid to Afghanistan*. The Khaama Press News Agency. <https://www.khaama.com/japan-approves-millions-of-dollars-in-aid-to-afghanistan-5656565/>

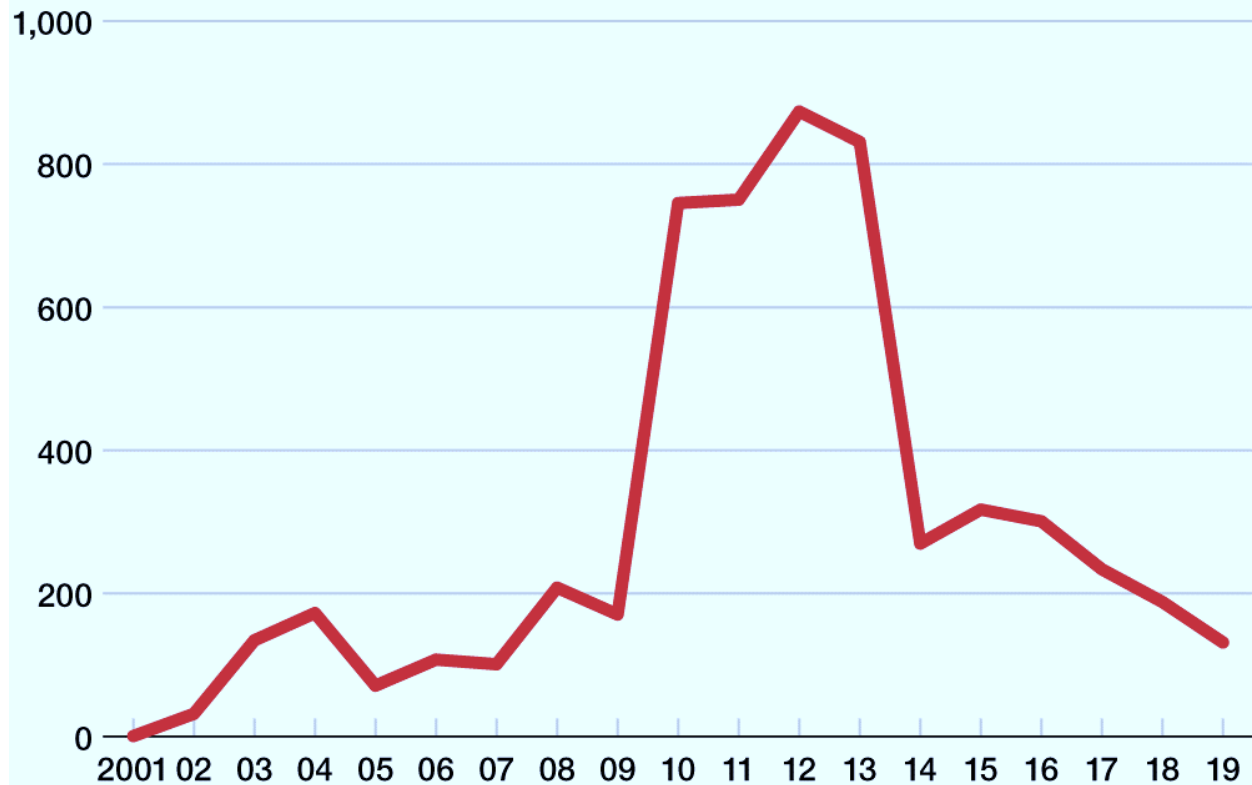
<sup>16</sup> **Free and Open Indo-Pacific jiyū de hirakareta Indotaiheyō senryaku** is an umbrella term that encompasses the Indo-Pacific-specific strategies of countries with similar interests in the region. The concept has been developed through Japanese and American cooperation.

مركز الملك. اليابان ودبلوماسية القوة الناعمة: إستراتيجية المحيطين الهندي – الهادي، منطقة حرة ومفتوحة. حبيب البدوي (2018, October). فيصل للبحوث والدراسات الإسلامية <https://kfcris.com/pdf/cada1432581a58bd2ca123169d134c455be15211a5daf.pdf>

rights. Derived from FOIP concepts, Tokyo supported the Afghan people on a variety of peaceful fronts, as detailed:

## Japan's ODA to Afghanistan 2001–19

(\$ million)



Created by *Nippon.com* based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' White Paper on Development Cooperation.

 nippon.com

Figure 2 - Japan was a major supporter of the reconstruction process in Afghanistan, providing \$6.9 billion (around ¥759 billion) in aid over 20 years.

First, Educational Aid:

- 1- Building more than 800 schools and renovating 121 others in cooperation with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund UNICEF<sup>17</sup>.
- 2- Supporting 700,000 Afghan students at various educational levels.

<sup>17</sup> Japan Times. (2018, April 3). *How Japan can help turn bunkers back into classrooms*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/how-japan-can-help-turn-bunkers-back-classrooms>

- 3- Training 10,000 teachers through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)<sup>18</sup>.
- 4- Building 15 institutes aiming for professional development.
- 5- Supporting illiteracy eradication projects in various methods. The ambitious program aimed at 10,000 adult citizens in the first phase and 600,000 citizens in the second phase in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<sup>19</sup>.

Second, Medical Aid:

- 1- Since 2001, polio vaccinations have been administered yearly<sup>20</sup>.
- 2- Building 77 medical clinics and providing equipment for 100 clinics that the United States constructed.
- 3- Aiding programs supporting “mother and child” health.
- 4- Establishing special clinics dedicated to treating infectious diseases in the capital, Kabul.
- 5- Ghor Governorate Hospital Rehabilitation<sup>21</sup>.
- 6- Balkh Hospital is being built in collaboration with Germany<sup>22</sup>.
- 7- Digging 1,000 water wells in remote villages.
- 8- Providing 20 trucks to transport water between remote Afghan governorates.

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<sup>18</sup> Afghanistan. (2022). JICA - 国際協力機構. <https://www.jica.go.jp/afghanistan/english/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Yasushi Sato. (2020). *UNESCO science report, 2010: the current status of science around the world*. unesdoc.unesco.org. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000211155>

<sup>20</sup> Govt. Afghanistan. (2016, December 13). *Government of Japan commits US\$ 12.4 million to provide life-saving vaccines and prevent the spread of infectious diseases in Afghanistan*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/government-japan-commits-us-124-million-provide-life-saving-vaccines-and-prevent>

<sup>21</sup> Govt. Afghanistan. (2012, January 23). *Japan will reconstruct the provincial hospital of Ghor*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/japan-will-reconstruct-provincial-hospital-ghor>

<sup>22</sup> Govt. Afghanistan. (2012, May 13). *Regional hospital with modern equipment opened in Balkh*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/regional-hospital-modern-equipment-opened-balkh>

- 9- Raising awareness of the importance of using clean water among rural residents.

### Third, Agricultural Aid:

- 1- Supporting rice cultivation in Nangahar province, increased the yield threefold<sup>23</sup>.
- 2- Financing farmers in Bamiyan province to build model farms.
- 3- Providing wheat seeds to the local farmers, within the framework of the UN plan to combat drug cultivation.
- 4- Cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations<sup>24</sup> to improve the quality of the productivity of Afghan farms.
- 5- Improving irrigation systems and building small hydroelectric facilities.
- 6- Training local employees to administratively assist in the management of the agricultural season.
- 7- Assisting the optimum use of water resources in agriculture.

### Fourth, Supporting Rural Areas' Development:

Japan imported the authentic products of Afghan villages, for example,

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<sup>23</sup> C/P Agency. (2011). *The Improvement of Rice-Based Agriculture in Nangarhar Province*. ページが見つかりませ  
ん - JICA. [https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2010\\_0613471\\_3\\_f.pdf](https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2010_0613471_3_f.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** was founded on October 16, 1945. FAO leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security. Its Latin motto, fiat panis, translates to "let there be bread".

FAO. (1955, November). *III. Program of the tenth anniversary celebrations*.  
<https://www.fao.org/3/x5575e/x5575e04.htm>



- a- Balkh Province: carpets and cooking oil.
  - b- Nangarhar Province: dairy products, garlic.
  - c- Bamiyan Province: carpets, potatoes.
- 1- Funding 1,000 development programs formulated by the communities themselves.
  - 2- Aiding 300 development programs at the district level.

Fifth, Infrastructure Building<sup>25</sup>:

- 1- Financing and completion of the 700 km ring road project, which serves the capital, Kabul.
- 2- Constructing an international road connecting Kabul and Jalalabad to reach the Pakistani border.
- 3- Funding the construction of many bridges, canals, and dams in remote mountain areas.
- 4- Upgrading the land transportation network in Bamiyan Governorate
- 5- Construction of the passenger terminal at Kabul International Airport (annual number of users: about 1.4 million).
- 6- Rehabilitation of airport berths at Kabul International Airport.
- 7- Providing 115 public buses for the city of Kabul.
- 8- Drafting a master plan for the development of the Kabul metropolitan area.

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<sup>25</sup> ASHIZAWA, K. (2014). JAPAN'S APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN: MONEY, DIPLOMACY AND THE CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 9(3), 1-16. Retrieved August 31, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48603496>



## Sixth, Humanitarian Aid<sup>26</sup>:

- 1- Providing 30,000 tons of food annually to the Afghan people.
- 2- Contributing to international food aid, such as the United Nations World Food Program<sup>27</sup>.
- 3- Providing school meals for about 2 million Afghan students annually.
- 4- Securing 2,600 shelters for about 38,000 displaced and displaced people.
- 5- Providing foodstuffs for about 4,600 families in refugee camps.
- 6- Providing prosthetic limbs for 30,000 Afghan casualties. The rise is due to successive wars, as well as the remnants of mines and unexploded ordnance.
- 7- Financing medical assistance and physical therapy for 150,000 Afghan citizens.

The number of Japanese nationals in Afghanistan has reached about 120 individuals, of whom about 30 are workers in the Japanese Embassy in Kabul, while 60 employees work with the "Japan International Cooperation Agency- JICA"<sup>28</sup>, and the others work in international organizations projects such as the UNESCO initiative in Bamiyan Valley<sup>29</sup>, also funded by the United Nations

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<sup>26</sup> Afg.emb-japan.go.jp. (2013, April). *Japan's Development Assistance to Afghanistan*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. [https://www.afg.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_en/eng\\_ODA\\_index.html](https://www.afg.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/eng_ODA_index.html)

<sup>27</sup> **The World Food Programme (WFP)** is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization focused on hunger and food security and the largest provider of school meals. Founded in 1961, it is headquartered in Rome and has offices in 80 countries. As of 2020, it served 115.5 million people in 80-plus countries, the largest since 2012.

World Food Programme. (2022). *Who we are*. UN World Food Programme (WFP). <https://www.wfp.org/who-we-are>

<sup>28</sup> JICA Afghanistan Office. (2012). *Employment opportunities*. JICA - 国際協力機構. <https://www.jica.go.jp/afghanistan/english/office/others/recruit.html>

<sup>29</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2020, March 3). *UNESCO and Japan support Afghanistan's efforts towards removing the Bamiyan Valley from the list of world heritage in danger*. World Heritage Convention. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2088>

Development Program<sup>30</sup>, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan<sup>31</sup>.

This vital humanitarian presence hastened its immediate exit with the collapse of the Afghan cartoon army, and on the same day of the fall of the Afghan capital, the Japanese embassy in Kabul was closed and its electronic platforms (Facebook and Twitter) were suspended<sup>32</sup>, while the Japanese Foreign Ministry stated that it had evacuated all personnel of its embassy in Kabul due to the possibility of the security situation deteriorating.

The ministry indicated that 12 Japanese embassy officials arrived in Dubai "on a military plane belonging to a friendly country" after its embassy in Kabul was closed on Sunday, and it also set up a temporary office in Istanbul to resume the embassy's work remotely<sup>33</sup>.

The Japanese government's chief spokesperson also said that Japan will send a military plane to Afghanistan at a later time to bring back its nationals amid the uncertainty in the country, and it is expected that more military transport planes will be sent to Afghanistan not only to bring back the Japanese citizens but also the Afghans who work in the Japanese embassy<sup>34</sup>.

Japan then sent three Japan Self-Defense Forces SDF<sup>35</sup>, the most important military transport planes they own (one C-2 and two C-130), to evacuate the

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<sup>30</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2019). *JAPAN – UNDP PARTNERSHIP*.

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2021-06/Japan-partner-brochure-2020.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Mainichi Japan. (2020, September 18). *Major role for Japan in rebuilding Afghanistan: Ex-UNAMA chief*. The Mainichi. <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20200918/p2a/00m/0in/009000c>

<sup>32</sup> Elaine Lies. (2021, August 17). *Japan closes embassy in Afghanistan*. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-closes-embassy-afghanistan-2021-08-17/>

<sup>33</sup> AMANE SUGAWARA. (2021, August 16). *Ministry: Embassy staff fleeing Kabul land in Dubai | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking news, Japan news and analysis*. The Asahi Shimbun. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14419690>

<sup>34</sup> Kyodo. (2021, August 18). *Japan evacuates embassy in Afghanistan as Taliban reclaim control*. The Japan Times. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/08/17/national/japan-evacuates-embassy-afghanistan/>

<sup>35</sup> **The Japan Self-Defense Forces *Jieitai*** are Japan's unified military forces, which were established in 1954.

The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and Japan Air Self-Defense Force represent the whole self-defense forces.

They are under the control of the Ministry of Defense, with the Prime Minister serving as commander-in-chief.

MARI YAMAGUCHI. (2021, December 6). *Japan's military, among world's strongest, looks to build*. ABC News.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japans-military-worlds-strongest-build-81576818>

remaining Japanese citizens and local staff who worked at the Japanese embassy and development agencies<sup>36</sup>.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga<sup>37</sup> said that Japan intends to prioritize the safe evacuation of Japanese citizens and embassy staff by all possible means. He stressed that Japan would cooperate closely with the Group of Seven (G7)<sup>38</sup> to "prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hotbed of terrorism again, to avoid an ongoing humanitarian crisis there and to protect women's rights." He added, "The stability and recovery of a country of geopolitical importance are strongly in Japan's national interest<sup>39</sup>."

In light of the acceleration of tragic events, especially after the terrorist bombing by the extremist organization ISIS<sup>40</sup>, Kyodo News Agency quoted unnamed official sources as saying that Japan estimates that it is difficult to ensure that operations at Kabul Airport are safe after the deadline for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan<sup>41</sup>, and that up to 500 people, in addition to their families, are still in the country, and in the course of assessing the security

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<sup>36</sup> KYODO NEWS, K. (2021, August 30). *Japan sends SDF aircraft to Afghanistan for evacuations*. Kyodo News+. <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/08/3019e8dcfeaf-breaking-news-japan-to-send-sdf-plane-to-afghanistan-for-evacuation-govt.html>

<sup>37</sup> **Yoshihide Suga** (born December 6, 1948) is a Japanese politician who served from 2020 to 2021 as Prime Minister of Japan and President of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). From 2012 to 2020, he was the Chief Cabinet Secretary in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's second administration. Suga was Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications during Abe's first administration, from 2006 to 2007. Gearoid Reidy. (2022, June 5). *The Long-Lasting Legacy of a Short-Term Prime Minister*. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-06-05/the-long-lasting-legacy-of-yoshihide-suga-a-short-term-japanese-prime-minister>

<sup>38</sup> The **Group of Seven (G7)** is an inter-governmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition, the European Union is a "non-enumerated member. Its members are the world's largest IMF advanced economies and liberal democracies; the group is officially organized around shared values of pluralism and representative government.

Blumenau, B. (2016). The Group of 7 and International Terrorism: The Snowball Effect That Never Materialized. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51(2), 316–334. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24671842>

<sup>39</sup> Reuters. (2021, August). *Japan will work closely with ally United States on Afghanistan response -PM Suga*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/japan-proposes-adding-four-regions-covid-19-emergency-minister-2021-07-29/>

<sup>40</sup> Anand Katakam, Simon Scarr. (2021, August 27). *Blast in Kabul*. Reuters. <https://graphics.reuters.com/AFGHANISTAN-CONFLICT/zjvqkdkqzvx/>

<sup>41</sup> Sputnik. (2021, August 30). *Japan mulls withdrawing evacuation forces from Afghanistan by September 1; US says will work till the very end*. Latest Asian, Middle East, Eurasian, Indian News. <https://eurasianimes.com/japan-mulls-withdrawing-evacuation-forces-from-afghanistan-by-september-1-us-says-will-work-till-the-very-end/>

situation on the ground, the Japanese government is considering possible alternative ways to evacuate them, such as the use of commercial airlines.

Afghanistan is the "graveyard of invading empires", a historical description, that US President Joe Biden<sup>42</sup> himself used<sup>43</sup>, but this rich land in Central Asia also has vast natural resources such as copper, marble, precious stones, and other minerals that can be used for technological purposes. The most important of which is "lithium"<sup>44</sup>. After geologists discovered the huge size of the country's mineral wealth, which is estimated to be worth at least one trillion dollars, this silver metal is essential for the production of electric cars and renewable energy batteries, and Afghanistan certainly has the largest reserves of it in the world<sup>45</sup>. It is worth noting that the US Department of Defense has issued an internal memo titled "Afghanistan Saudi Arabia for Lithium"<sup>46</sup>.

In addition to the possibility of Japan investing in these huge natural resources, it must be pointed out that with the tacit approval of the US administration for the Taliban to take over the reins of Afghanistan, supported by the general acceptance of the Afghan power shift in the Islamic world, in particular the conservative majority, the West in general can open a new chapter in relations with the new rules of Kabul.

Will Japan respond to Afghan friendliness in order to achieve its economic, political, and strategic interests first, especially with the increasing challenge of

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<sup>42</sup> **Joe Biden** (born November 20, 1942) is the 46th and current President of the United States of America. He is a Democrat who previously served as Barack Obama's 47th vice president from 2009 to 2017. He previously represented Delaware in the United States Senate from 1973 to 2009.

The White House. (2022, July 12). *Joe Biden: The president*.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-biden/>

<sup>43</sup> The White House. (2021, August 16). *Remarks by President Biden on Afghanistan*.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/16/remarks-by-president-biden-on-afghanistan/>

<sup>44</sup> Blumenthal, L., Purdy, C., & Bassetti, V. (2022, August 3). *Chinese investment in Afghanistan's lithium sector: A long shot in the short term*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2022/08/03/chinese-investment-in-afghanistans-lithium-sector-a-long-shot-in-the-short-term/>

<sup>45</sup> McDonnell, T. (2021, August 16). *The Taliban now controls one of the world's biggest lithium deposits*. Quartz. <https://qz.com/2047785/under-the-taliban-what-will-happen-to-afghanistans-minerals/>

<sup>46</sup> NYT. (2010, June 14). *U.S. identifies vast mineral Riches in Afghanistan*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html>

China (the close ally of Pakistan), or are the expected risks higher, especially with the existence of "terror for rent", multiple loyalty, and absurdity?

## **2- China's Silk Road Initiative passes through Afghanistan.**

While Washington was sinking into the swamps of Iraq and Afghanistan in futile invasions, Beijing was quietly working to launch the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>47</sup> to revive the historic "Silk Road"<sup>48</sup> that linked China to the world, based on building the "widest infrastructure in the globe" linking the Asian and European continents (including by sea, Africa, and Latin America).

By land, the initiative includes six main economic corridors that form the backbone of the network of trade, transport, and upcoming regional and international development, namely:

- 1- The new Eurasian land bridge, extends from western China to western Russia.
- 2- The "China - Mongolia - Russia" corridor, extends from northern China to the Russian east.
- 3- The "China - Central Asia - Western Asia" corridor, extends from western China to Turkey
- 4- The "China - Indochina Peninsula" corridor, extends from southern China to Singapore.
- 5- The "China - Pakistan" corridor, extends from southwest China to Pakistan.
- 6- The "Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar" corridor, extends from south China to India.

At sea, the initiative focuses on building links between major ports, and among the proposed sea lanes are a corridor linking Chinese ports to the Pacific Ocean via the South China Sea, and other linking Chinese ports to Europe.

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<sup>47</sup> **China's Belt and Road Initiative BRI** is a strategy initiated by the People's Republic of China that seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade, and stimulate economic growth.

Yu Jie, Jon Wallace. (2022, March 28). *What is China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI)?* Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/what-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri>

<sup>48</sup> Guo Zhaowen. (2014). *Silk Roads*. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/about-silk-roads>

This Chinese ambition triggered the Trade War<sup>49</sup> with the US<sup>50</sup>. The Asian dragon loomed, especially since Washington's debt to Beijing had reached 1.2 trillion dollars<sup>51</sup>, with China's refusal to sharply reduce its shares in US Treasury bonds because this would harm its own interests, thus fuel market fluctuations of a dangerous nature.

The current global confrontation is buzzing in the country of Afghanistan, and there are two important land stations for the corridor of Chinese ambition, namely the capital, Kabul, "the Jewel of the East," and Nangarhar, where the archaeological site of Haddah is the cradle of Buddhist civilization<sup>52</sup>.

The main option for linking Afghanistan to the Chinese initiative is through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor<sup>53</sup>, which operates the four railway stations in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, and Nangarhar, as well as northward trails through the Central Asian republics.

Hence, before the resounding fall of the cartoon Afghan government, the Chinese authorities hosted a delegation from the Taliban movement<sup>54</sup>, and the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced its desire to contribute to the reconstruction

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<sup>49</sup> **The China–United States Trade War** is an ongoing economic conflict between China and the United States of America. In January 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump began imposing tariffs and other trade barriers on China in order to force it to change its unfair trade practices and intellectual property theft. According to the Trump administration, these practices may contribute to the US-China trade deficit, as the Chinese government demands that American technology be transferred to China. In response to US trade measures, China accused the Trump administration of engaging in nationalist protectionism and retaliated.

Zhang, Y. (2018). The US–China Trade War: A Political and Economic Analysis. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 31(1/2), 53–74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26608823>

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2019, November 6). *Trade war leaves both US and China worse off*. UNCTAD. <https://unctad.org/news/trade-war-leaves-both-us-and-china-worse>

<sup>51</sup> Borzykowski, B. (2018, April 5). *China's \$1.2 trillion weapon that could be used in a trade war with the US*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/05/chinas-1-point-2-trillion-weapon-that-could-be-used-in-a-us-trade-war.html>

<sup>52</sup> Green, N. (2017). THE AFGHAN DISCOVERY OF BUDDHA: CIVILIZATIONAL HISTORY AND THE NATIONALIZING OF AFGHAN ANTIQUITY. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49(1), 47-70. doi:10.1017/S0020743816001136

<sup>53</sup> **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** is a collection of infrastructure projects that began construction in Pakistan in 2013. Originally valued at \$47 billion, CPEC projects are now worth \$62 billion as of 2020. Through the construction of modern transportation networks, numerous energy projects, and special economic zones, CPEC aims to rapidly upgrade Pakistan's required infrastructure and strengthen its economy.

Ahmar, M. (2014). Strategic Meaning of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Strategic Studies*, 34/35, 35–49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48527474>

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. (2022, July 26). *Work together towards a peaceful and stable Afghanistan*. 中华人民共和国外交部.

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/202207/t20220729\\_10730107.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202207/t20220729_10730107.html)



of Afghanistan<sup>55</sup>, calling for friendly relations with the Taliban<sup>56</sup>. Meanwhile, the Chinese embassy in Washington announced that Beijing seeks to "avoid further expansion of the conflict in Afghanistan"<sup>57</sup>.

The Chinese media have discussed publicly the prospects for future cooperation based on the agreement previously signed between Beijing and Kabul<sup>58</sup>, in which Chinese soft diplomacy contributes through reconstruction initiatives, educational grants, and the health sector to strengthen the friendly relationship with the Afghans. The Chinese official statements were positive toward the Taliban<sup>59</sup>, while Chinese state television hosted the Taliban's spokesman<sup>60</sup> in a dialogue meeting in which the intentions of Afghanistan's reconstruction were discussed, which is a clear indication of the intentions.

In return, China will benefit from the rare and precious minerals in Afghan land, which are estimated at between 1.5 trillion<sup>61</sup> and three trillion dollars<sup>62</sup>. These rare natural resources, over which China controls a large portion of its global reserves, are one of the American industry's weaknesses, also one of the Chinese

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<sup>55</sup> Noel Celis. (2021, August 16). *China ready for 'friendly relations' with Taliban, welcomes Afghan development projects*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210816-china-ready-for-friendly-relations-with-taliban-welcomes-afghan-development-projects>

<sup>56</sup> Grant McCool. (2021, July 28). *China says Taliban expected to play 'important' Afghan peace role*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/taliban-delegation-visits-china-taliban-spokesperson-2021-07-28/>

<sup>57</sup> Tom O'Connor. (2021, August 2). *What Russia, China, Iran wants in Afghanistan when U.S. troops leave*. Newsweek. [https://www.newsweek.com/what-russia-china-iran-want-afghanistan-when-us-troops-leave-1612385?utm\\_source=Flipboard&utm\\_medium=App&utm\\_campaign=Partnerships](https://www.newsweek.com/what-russia-china-iran-want-afghanistan-when-us-troops-leave-1612385?utm_source=Flipboard&utm_medium=App&utm_campaign=Partnerships)

<sup>58</sup> Sebastien Goulard. (2021, July 1). *Afghanistan: The heart of the new Silk Road strategy?* OBOReuropa. <https://www.oboreurope.com/en/afghanistan-new-silk-road/>

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. (2021, August 16). *Foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying's regular press conference*. 中华人民共和国外交部. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202108/t20210816\\_9170798.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202108/t20210816_9170798.html)

<sup>60</sup> Tian Wei. (2021, August 19). *CGTN exclusively talks to Taliban's spokesperson Suhail Shaheen*. CGTN. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-08-19/CGTN-exclusively-talks-to-Taliban-s-spokesperson-Suhail-Shaheen-12RaOiE4qFa/index.html>

<sup>61</sup> Ahmad Shah Katawazai. (2020, February 1). *Afghanistan's mineral resources are a lost opportunity and a threat*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/afghanistans-mineral-resources-are-a-lost-opportunity-and-a-threat/>

<sup>62</sup> Dolan, C. (2021, April 15). *Why the US will never leave Afghanistan*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/548557-why-the-us-will-never-leave-afghanistan?rl=1>



government's strengths in its trade war, specifically the technical battle with the US<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Hass, R., & Denmark, A. (2022, March 9). *More pain than gain: How the US-China trade war hurt America*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/07/more-pain-than-gain-how-the-us-china-trade-war-hurt-america/>

# China's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan



中国援助  
CHINA AID  
FOR SHARED FUTURE



About **22.8m** Afghan people faced acute hunger since Nov 2021

About **3.5m** Afghan people displaced since Jan 2021

China has provided humanitarian aid worth **300 million yuan** (\$47 million) to Afghanistan since last August.



## Winter supplies

Two batches of China-aid blankets and down coats arrived in Afghanistan in Sep and Dec 2021.

The second batch of aid alone can benefit **40,000 to 50,000** Afghan families in need.



## Pine nuts

China has arranged 36 charter flights to import Afghan pine nuts, bringing more than **\$22 million** in revenue to Afghanistan.



## Coronavirus

China has donated **1.5 million** doses of coronavirus vaccines and anti-epidemic materials such as ventilators, masks, and protective suits since the epidemic outbreak.



## Aid to children

China has worked with the UNHCR to provide emergency camps, kitchen utensils and more than **20,000** bags to displaced refugees and school children.



## Food supplies

China has provided more than **10,000** tons of food to Afghanistan including wheat, sugar and cooking oil.



## Welfare projects

China has supported the construction of water wells and other projects that matter to Afghan people's lives.

Source: media reports

GLOBAL  
TIMES

Graphic: Feng Qingyin/GT

Figure 3 - China's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

There is no doubt that China can count on its Pakistani ally to control the Taliban threat<sup>64</sup>. China has invested tens of billions of dollars in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor initiative, which includes a range of infrastructure projects, including \$45.6 billion under construction across Pakistan since 2013<sup>65</sup>, out of the total projects in the Pakistan-China corridor of \$70 billion<sup>66</sup>.

A Chinese telecommunications network, an air route between Kabul and Urumqi, and a \$2.83 billion contract to operate a copper mine in Logar province, about 40 kilometers southeast of Kabul<sup>67</sup> are now operational in Afghanistan. This provides the Taliban with some liquidity to carry out the governmental burdens resulting from its seizure of power.

Despite these mutual economic temptations, the Chinese government is still waiting for a clear vision of the new government to be established in Kabul, as well as to learn what arrangements were reached during the lengthy negotiations in Doha between Taliban leaders and American negotiators<sup>68</sup>. Ten rounds of long and detailed talks must have produced an agreement on terms and confidential clauses, the aftermath of which will appear over time.

Here, we must not forget the tragedy of the Muslim Uyghur minority in China<sup>69</sup>. Will it turn out to be an American pressure card towards Beijing? Or did

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<sup>64</sup> Derek Grossman. (2021, September 21). *China and Pakistan see eye to eye on the Taliban—Almost*. RAND Corporation Provides Objective Research Services and Public Policy Analysis | RAND.

<https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/09/china-and-pakistan-see-eye-to-eye-on-the-taliban-almost.html>

<sup>65</sup> Zahra-Malik, M. (2014, November 21). *China commits \$45.6 billion for economic corridor with Pakistan*. U.S.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-china-idINKCN0J51BS20141121>

<sup>66</sup> Faseeh Mangi. (202, July 16). *Belt and Road Re-Emerges in Pakistan With Flurry of China Deals*. Bloomberg.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-15/belt-and-road-re-emerges-in-pakistan-with-flurry-of-china-deals>

<sup>67</sup> Emily Feng, John Ruwitch. (2021, August 23). *Here's what a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan may mean for China*.

NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/23/1029622154/heres-what-a-taliban-controlled-afghanistan-may-mean-for-china>

<sup>68</sup> United States Department of State. (2020, February 29). *Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the United States of America*. U.S. Department of State.

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> ROBERTS, S. R. (2020). *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority* (Vol. 78). Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvsf1qdg>

Chinese diplomacy get a promise from the Taliban that they would ensure that there would be no presence of Uyghur insurgents that could be a threat to China"<sup>70</sup>.

## Closure

History recalls the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese War<sup>71</sup> after the American withdrawal from Saigon, so did the United States make its archrival China fall into the Afghan trap? Especially with the populist media talking about the proximity of the "Bagram"<sup>72</sup> base to Chinese territory and the possibility of turning it into a camp for the People's Liberation Army PLA<sup>73</sup>.

Is the Afghan people destined to face a fourth invasion? Or will Chinese diplomacy realize the American ambush and adopt soft diplomacy to achieve its economic goals and national interests on Afghan soil?

The top priority for Japan and China in the region is stability and security. Without it, FOIP, BRI, and other investments would be jeopardized. The Taliban is now a much more sophisticated political, military, and social organization than it was twenty years ago, has a better chance of providing the bare minimum of security and stability required to mobilize infrastructure investment in the country.

This could compel Tokyo and Beijing to recognize the group as Afghanistan's government, thereby increasing Japanese and Chinese aid, investment, and influence in the country and region.

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<sup>70</sup> Asim Kashgarian. (2021, August 20). *China's outreach to Taliban draws mixed reactions*. VOA.

<https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/chinas-outreach-taliban-draws-mixed-reactions>

<sup>71</sup> The **Sino-Vietnamese War** occurred in early 1979 as a border conflict between China and Vietnam. China launched an offensive in response to Vietnam's actions against the Khmer Rouge in 1978, effectively ending the Khmer Rouge's rule. In this third Indochina War, both China and Vietnam claimed victory.

Hung, N. M. (1979). The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play among Communist Neighbors. *Asian Survey*, 19(11), 1037–1052. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643953>

<sup>72</sup> **Bagram Airfield (BAF)** was built by the Soviet Union and was formerly the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan. It was staffed by the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing of the US Air Force, as well as rotating units of US and coalition forces. Kabul International Airport is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Bagram and is connected by two separate roads.

Military Bases. (2022, March 21). *Bagram air base in Parvan province, Afghanistan*.

<https://militarybases.com/overseas/afghanistan/bagram/>

<sup>73</sup> WION (2021, July 27). *Is the Chinese military planning to enter Afghanistan?*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_Uizq0eLAc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_Uizq0eLAc)

Japanese and Chinese leaders would be wise to be wary of the risks hidden behind Afghanistan's vast reserves and other geoeconomics benefits. After all, the country is known as the "Graveyard of Empires" for a rational reason.

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