

**Afghanistan**

## China's foreign minister to hold talks with the Taliban

Beijing looks at boosting investment in Afghanistan and bringing it into Belt and Road project



Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang will hold talks on Saturday in Pakistan with Afghanistan's acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, and Pakistan's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari © Chine Nouvelle/SIPA/Shutterstock

**Benjamin Parkin** in London, **Farhan Bokhari** in Islamabad and **John Reed** in New Delhi  
YESTERDAY

China's foreign minister will meet officials from the Taliban at the weekend as Beijing explores boosting investment in Afghanistan, including bringing the crisis-hit country into its Belt and Road infrastructure project.

Qin Gang will hold talks on Saturday in Pakistan with Afghanistan's acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, and Pakistan's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Saturday as part of the China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue.

The three ministers will discuss "regional stability and transit", according to [Afghanistan's](#) foreign ministry, along with boosting trade ties.

The meeting comes after China's foreign ministry said last month that it "welcomes Afghanistan's participation in Belt and Road co-operation and supports Afghanistan's integration into regional economic co-operation and connectivity".

Since ousting the Nato-backed government in 2021 after two-decades of war, the Taliban have courted global powers including China and Russia for investment to shore up the crumbling economy and ease the regime's international isolation.

This includes efforts to attract Chinese infrastructure investment to connect Afghanistan with neighbours, such as Pakistan, through BRI.

Beijing has invested billions in Pakistan through the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, an [under-construction network](#) of roads, trains and ports which is ultimately expected to be worth up to \$60bn.

“The idea is to engage Afghanistan in economic activity that has already linked China and Pakistan together,” a Pakistani official told the Financial Times.

Chinese and Afghan officials said in January that the state-run Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Company had agreed a deal to drill for oil in the country. The Taliban also last year agreed a deal with Russia to source oil and wheat.

But while Afghanistan's rich, unexplored reserves of minerals such as lithium and copper have [long enticed foreign nations](#), meaningful investment in infrastructure or mining has so far proved prohibitively difficult because of the precarious security situation.

State-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation in 2007 secured the rights to Mes Aynak, one of the world's largest known copper reserves, but did not develop it.

Afghanistan has suffered an economic catastrophe since the Taliban's return prompted the US and its allies to cut off most financing.

UN secretary-general António Guterres this week said the country was trapped in “the largest humanitarian crisis in the world today”. Around 28mn people, or two-thirds of its population, require aid with six million people approaching famine, according to the UN.

The Taliban have also imposed their hardline ideology, [banning girls and women](#) from education and work. This has prompted many foreign governments to break off engagement with the group.

China and Pakistan both consider maintaining ties with the Taliban as vital to [their security](#). Analysts say that Afghanistan is a base for several regional terrorist groups including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which Pakistani officials blame for a surge of violence, as well as Uyghur militant group the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

The deteriorating situation has provoked alarm around the region. Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov met his Pakistani counterpart Bhutto Zardari this week in India, at which the pair discussed the situation in Afghanistan.

In remarks to journalists, Lavrov said he expected the Taliban to “deliver (on) their

promises to come up with an inclusive government . . . [and] ensuring the representation of the full spectrum of political forces in Afghanistan". He added: "This hasn't been done yet."

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