

China moves to take over Afghanistan copper, rare earth mineral mining

[Jazz Shaw](#) Mar 14, 2022 2:31 PM ET



AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

Shortly after our botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, one of the first developments we noticed taking place with the rapid entry of China into the country. As anyone associated with the American presence there was going into hiding in fear of their lives, China quickly restaffed their embassy in Kabul and moved to normalize relations with the newly arrived Taliban government. They promised a faster flow of relief money and humanitarian aid, a promise which they quickly delivered on. Those moves didn't seem all that surprising at the time. After all, China had already been working

overtime to expand their presence and influence to the west and Afghanistan was a prime candidate. Also, the amount of money it would cost them to get a seat at the table wouldn't be all that high. But did they have something else in mind as well? Apparently so. China appears to have been playing the long game because this week they struck a deal with the Taliban [to begin mining one of the richest copper deposits in the world](#). Afghanistan's other mineral assets will also be on their shopping list, and the Taliban seem all too happy to oblige. (Wall Street Journal)

Following the American exit from Afghanistan, China's move to claim the country's vast mineral wealth is centered on a mountain south of Kabul.

The mountain and the barren surrounding valley, in Logar province, a two-hour drive from the capital, contain one of the world's biggest untapped reserves of copper.

China is negotiating with Taliban authorities to start mining at the site, called Mes Aynak, according to Chinese and Taliban officials. Beijing is also in talks to begin work on oil-and-gas reserves in the north of the country, Amu Darya. Both projects were on hold for years because of the war, which ended when the Taliban seized power in August.

It isn't just copper that China is after, although that's quickly becoming a far more valuable commodity than in the past. Afghanistan [is also home to](#) one of the largest untapped deposits of lithium in the world. Whoever controls that will have a huge upper hand in the battery market, which is exploding as nations move to green energy and electric vehicles. At Khanneshin in Helmand province, there are rich supplies of rare earth minerals including lanthanum, cerium, and neodymium. [One survey from 2014](#) estimated that the country has at least one trillion dollars in rare earth minerals waiting to be exploited.

Controlling all of these resources will give China a huge leg up in the 21st-century technology market. And they got their hands on it for the price of a supply of bread and vegetables for the starving Afghans and some cash to keep the Taliban afloat as they reestablished their new order. Plus, just think of all the jobs that these mines will create and which the Taliban will be able to take credit for. Never mind the fact that they will be mining jobs with few safety precautions in place that will probably kill more Afghans than they enrich. As long as they're offering steady paychecks of even a few dollars per day, people will line up to do the work.

It's long been known that all of this mineral wealth was buried under the ground in Afghanistan. The problem is, for the last twenty years or more it's simply been too dangerous for companies to go in there and try to extract them. When a mining operation is under constant threat of attack by terrorists, thoughts of profits quickly go out the window. But now that the terrorists are the ones in charge and handing out mining permits, China can dive in with both feet in relative safety.

You almost have to admire the planning that went into this. And it wasn't as if nobody saw it coming. Even as we were still scrambling to get the last of our forces out of the country, [CNBC predicted](#) that China would attempt to capitalize on all of the mineral wealth awaiting them there. And now it's happening right before our eyes and there probably isn't a single thing anyone can do about it.