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A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF CHINA ROLE IN AFGHAN PEACE
PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The people of Afghanistan have been suffering for the last two decades and the presence of American forces in Kabul has not helped accomplish any constructive political outcomes up until now. A hasty withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan will not be a mature step towards political stability in Afghanistan. The Chinese leadership is exploring all possible measures to establish lasting peace in Afghanistan. The aim of this study is to find out why China played an active role in the Doha deal. The study is qualitative in nature, using an exploratory method. Beijing not only played a vital role in paving the ground for the Afghan reconciliation process, but also helped the current unity regime in Kabul to improve law and order. A stable Afghanistan would be an oasis in the heart of Central Asia, and if Afghanistan is unstable, it will be a safe

haven for most religious extremists and terrorists. It will also be a security threat to the entire regional countries around Afghanistan. Beijing has been doing its best to end the long bloodshed in Afghanistan.

Introduction

To end the longest war in the history of US in Afghanistan, the International Community has been making efforts from a long time to resolve the Afghan conflict peacefully by negotiation with Taliban. And finally the world efforts bring some changes for Afghans in 2020. Taliban and the US signed deal on 29 February 2020 in the capital of Qatar. Since the agreement between the United States and the Taliban in Doha on 2020, though certain new developments like formation of an inclusive Afghan negotiating team and progress towards exchange of prisoners from both Taliban and Afghan regime reflect the 'promise of peace', a few more events, but, there are many spoilers inside and outside Afghanistan who are not happy with this deal because their interest are hurts and these spoilers of peace are still active playing a destructive role in the region. China, being the neighbour of Afghanistan and an emerging power, has played a very constructive role in the Afghan peace process. China behind the curtains has been playing an important role in helping the peaceful dialogue between the US and Taliban. In contrast, Afghan peace spoilers are continuously trying to spoil Chinese efforts through disruptions in the peace process (The News, 2020). There is a broad understanding that "there is no military solution to the Afghanistan conflict" and "no Afghan should remain outside of this peace process." The presence of American troops on Afghan soil has been taken as a serious strategic threat by China. Therefore, it has been closely following the peace agreement signed by the US and Taliban in Doha on Feb. 29, 2020. Actually, Beijing is an active facilitator in the Afghan peace process. China has a purpose to engage with Afghanistan for many reasons, such as the security of the Xinjiang region from the Afghanistan border and economic interests as well in Afghanistan. China needs a peaceful and stable neighborhood to advance its economic interests. The new Silk Road initiative Beijing wants to expand its economic influence westward towards Europe by increasing trade and development in Central Asia by using the Afghan route. With the important economic, political, and security assistance of Beijing towards the Afghan regime, China is in a position to support the Afghan government in the peace process and the Taliban are also keeping a very optimistic approach towards China in these peace initiatives (Ministry of FA of China, 2021).

Literature review

Official diplomatic relations between Beijing and Kabul were established in 1955. In 1996, when the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan, China reduced relations with the Taliban at that time. However, after the incident of 9/11 happened in America, US and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban regime, China restored relations with the newly elected President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. Both Kabul and Beijing signed the 'Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations'. Under this treaty, China has to respect Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty as well as support the peace process in Afghanistan and provide aid for reconstruction. In 2008, China showed a deep interest in Afghanistan when the Afghan regime allowed foreign investors. In 2010, Afghan President Hamid Karzai's visit to China, both Afghanistan and China inked three important pacts, which were hydroelectric fields, economic and technical cooperation. China has emerged as an important player in establishing peace and has contributed to the development and periphery of Afghanistan. China is an important neighbour of Afghanistan, and due to insecure Afghanistan, China has always faced negative consequences in Xinjiang province. China has been blamed for several deadly attacks throughout China over the last decade by the Uighur separatist group East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). In 2014, China offered both the Afghan regime and the Taliban to act as mediators for talks over the peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government, though it should be noted that China pursued an "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace process when the Chinese Minister of Public Security, Guo Shengkun, visited Afghanistan (Council FR, 2014). Moreover, Beijing is keen on resolving the conflict in Afghanistan and China is playing a constructive part in different forums around the world. China played a very active role in the Afghan peace process from 2016 to 2017. The first meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) of China, the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process was held in Islamabad in 2016. All four countries emphasized the importance of bringing an end to the conflict in Afghanistan that continues to cause senseless violence on the Afghan people and also breeds insecurity throughout the region, especially in their neighboring countries (Abdul, 2019). The participants highlighted the immediate need for direct talks between the Kabul regime and the Taliban in a peace process that aims to preserve Afghanistan's unity, power and regional integrity. In other Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) meetings, China was an active part and played a very crucial role in ending the Afghan war.

Research Methodology

The nature of the study is qualitative to know why China plays a positive role in the Doha peace deal. For data collection, the current study was collected from various reports prepared by national and international agencies on the Afghan peace process. Information was collected from various authentic websites. Different journals, articles, reports, editorials, and academic papers besides face-to-face and telephonic interviews with famous politicians, NGO representatives, media people, defense analysts, and e-contents relating to the Doha peace process were studied. For the sampling technique, interviews with journalists, defense analysts, and professors were conducted for the aforementioned study.

Research Question:

Why does China play an active role in the Doha Peace Deal?

Objectives

To end rival countries, particularly India, from getting a hegemonic role in their western periphery, Afghanistan.

Promotion, protection, and initiation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Afghanistan.

To promote economic interests, including natural resources, and investment in Afghanistan.

Results and Discussion

Insecurity in Xinjiang

China shares a 100-km long border with Afghanistan, which runs through high mountains and lies far away from the urban centers on both sides. Beijing's primary security interests in the broader Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan region have come to centre on preventing any support for Uighur militancy and any increased Islamization and mobilization of the Chinese Uighur community. Beijing's increasing involvement in Afghanistan's politics is driven not only by economic reasons, but also by China's own domestic problems with Islamic extremism in the form of Uighur militants from China's restive Xinjiang province. China is concerned about the 'Islamic State' (IS) gaining a permanent foothold in Afghanistan and establishing relations with Uighur militants. This will be a strategic threat to the security of China, not only for the Xinjiang province, but for the whole country (ORF,

2021). Many Uighur militants use fake Turkish passports to enter Afghanistan and Pakistan to join terrorist groups. That makes Beijing anxious about the long war in Afghanistan. The instability and endless conflict in Afghanistan insecure China's Western Xinjiang province. If these terrorists and extremist religious forces gain a foothold in the country, it will threaten security and stability in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Tibet Independent Region. That is why China is so concerned about the stability and security of Xinjiang province. The war in Afghanistan is a vital factor which is unstable not only the Beijing Xinjiang province but also the overall security situation in the South Asia region. If the Taliban control the reins of Afghanistan in the future, there will be peace in the Xinjiang province of China, according to Chinese experts.

Access to Central Asia Markets

Central Asia (C+C5) is a huge economic market and it is the dream of every country to reach its goods to the Central Asian markets. Once a country gets access to the Central Asian market, then it can easily reach the European market. Central Asia (C+C5) and China are important trading allies for each other, although this relationship has the potential to grow and diversify. The launch of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project by China in 2013, later designated as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has boosted the importance of Central Asia for China by connecting it with Europe and the Middle East. Central Asia plays a very significant role in two of the three proposed belts that make up the Silk Road Economic Belt: The North belt goes through Central Asia and Russia to Europe; the Central belt passes through Central Asia and West Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean; and the South belt runs from China through Southeast Asia and South Asia and on to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan. As BRI development continues, multilateral trade between Central Asia and China can be expected to grow significantly with more frequent economic interactions and cooperation. The regional connectivity between China and Central Asia with Europe and the Middle East has been enhanced through the Belt and Road Initiative projects. Moreover, the best and shortest way that China can access the central Asian market is through Afghanistan. That is why China is doing their best to bring peace in Afghanistan, because once peace comes in Afghanistan, China can easily send their goods to Central Asia and then European markets. However, when there is instability in Afghanistan, China cannot use the Afghanistan route for trade to central Asia and then European markets.

Trade in Goods: Exports from China to Central Asian Countries (US\$ million)						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Growth rate (2015-19)
Kazakhstan	8441	8292	11564	11327	12807	52%
Kyrgyzstan	4282	5605	5337	5547	6312	47%
Tajikistan	1795	1725	1301	1426	1612	-10%
Turkmenistan	815	338	368	317	431	-47%
Uzbekistan	2229	2007	2749	3942	5045	126%
Central Asia in total	17563	17969	21320	22558	26207	49%

Source: UN Comtrade Database (<https://comtrade.un.org/data/>)

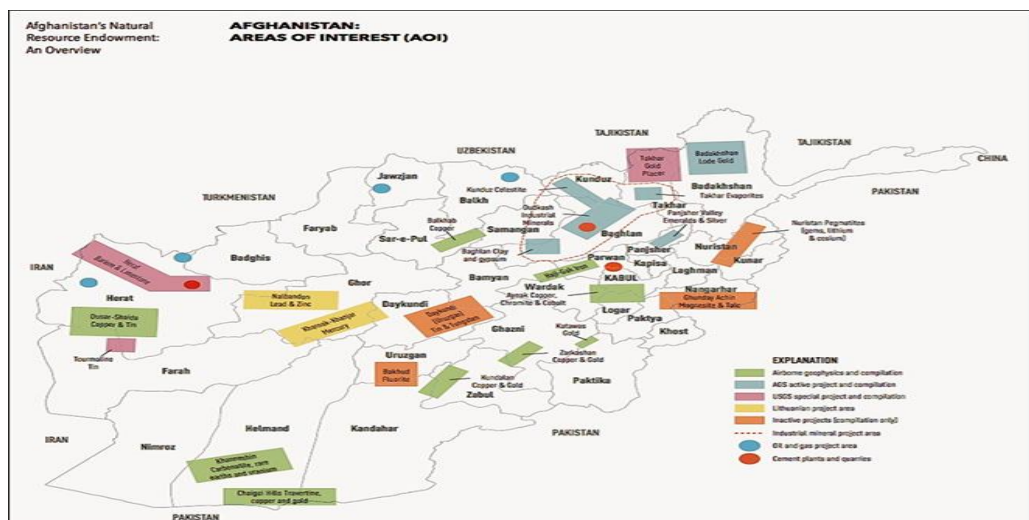
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The America Influence will be reducing in the Region

The presence of Americans in Afghanistan is a threat to China's hegemonic power in the region. Since 9/11, the presence of US troops in Afghanistan has presented a dilemma for Beijing. China instinctively sees US forces in China's "backyard" as a serious security threat. When Americans attacked Afghanistan, there were some objects behind it, but the one most important aim was to counter the expansion of both China and Russia in the region. Nowadays, the influence of the US is not only in Afghanistan but in the whole region. Every country wants dominance in Afghanistan because Afghanistan is the heart of Asia. It connects three regions: the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. It means influence in Afghanistan is like influence in the whole three regions. Besides that, there are many countries who have maximum economic, political, and security interests in Afghanistan. When US troops exit from Afghanistan, the influence of the US will be no longer in the region or in Afghanistan to dictate the countries in the region. First of all, China will cash in this opportunity and increase its influence in Afghanistan, which is very significant for China from an economic point of view. Secondly, to protect their investment in the region and in Afghanistan, i.e. (BRI, CPEC), because the US is completely against these projects, Washington started propaganda warfare with the help of India against BRI. Recently, Joe Biden approved an extra \$300 million in the 2021 budget for the media to tell the world about the negative consequences of BRI. Once the US leaves Afghan soil, China can easily replace the US in the region. After that, Beijing will secure its security, political and economic interests in Afghanistan and also in the region.

To Explore Natural Resources in Afghanistan

China is the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan. According to a Bloomberg survey in 2011, the mineral wealth on Afghan soil is estimated to be worth \$1–3 trillion when extracted. Afghanistan is the hub of natural resources that draw the attention of Beijing to invest in Afghanistan. The United States geological survey estimated that Afghanistan has about \$1 trillion in natural resources, including 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil and 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, 240 million tons of copper, iron and lithium. These large amounts of resources attract China’s attention to get benefit from it. Beijing invested one billion dollars in different development projects in Afghanistan. For the past twelve years, China has adopted a two-step process to raise its stake in Afghanistan. First, on the political side, Beijing made good attempts with both the Afghan regime and the Taliban to support a political settlement in Afghanistan after the peace deal signed on 29 February 2020. On the investment front, the PRC (people republic of China) first entered Afghan soil in 2007 as a major investor, when China won the 3.5 billion contract to operate the Ayanak copper-gold mine in Logar province in Afghanistan (Yun Sun, 2020). Then China further invested in oil and gas exploration projects and railway infrastructure in Afghanistan. So, when there is peace on Afghan soil, most of the investment and ongoing projects of China will be secure, but if there is a war-like situation, all the investment of Beijing will not be safe. That’s why China is so optimistic about the current peace process, which was inked in 2020, and China will work with other countries to bring peace in Afghanistan too.



Source: The Daily Times News paper

Security of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CEPC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) is one of the corridors of BRI. China and Pakistan are trying to expand the multi-billion dollar project CPEC, a flagship BRI project in Afghanistan. Additionally, China has pledged to invest \$100 billion in BRI investments in Afghanistan (TRT World, 2019). Many countries in the region and outside the region are not happy with CPEC's success because they consider this flagship as a strategic threat. Pakistan will join the China camp and the US will not do this. This project will boost the economies of both Pakistan and China and the influence of China will increase in the region. The two countries which are against the CPEC are America and India. These countries use non-state actors to destabilize CPEC. In 2019, United States Assistant Secretary Alice Wells said and also warned "that CPEC will add to Pakistan's debt woes. She further said that CPEC was not an aid to Pakistan but a form of financing that guarantees profits for Chinese state-owned enterprises, with few benefits for Islamabad. Wells also emphasized the need for Pakistan to know that China was providing loans, not grants, like the US. The Indian intelligence agency RAW has established a special cell to sabotage CPEC. So, there are different groups and countries which want to sabotage CPEC. When the US leaves the region, CPEC will be secure from terrorist groups like TTP, BRA, and BLA, which both the US and India are supporting against China's CPEC project. Furthermore, when there is instability in Afghanistan, the project will also be affected because it passes near the Afghan border. There are many attacks happening in Baluchistan on CPEC. Once the Americans withdraw from Afghanistan, China and Pakistan will protect CPEC from terrorist groups with the help of the new government in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

China is the biggest beneficiary if peace prevails on Afghan soil. China is playing a pivotal role in bringing stability to Afghanistan. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan secures the economy and security interests of China. That's why China is continually trying its best to bring both the Taliban and the Afghan government to the peace table. Not only the US, but the world also acknowledges the role of China in the Afghan peace process. China's role in the Afghan Peace Process acknowledges China's struggles to bring durable peace to Afghanistan. Beijing is playing a vital role in assisting Afghanistan in the peace process. China was instrumental in convincing the local players that Afghan problems need home-made solutions. China is committed to boosting the Afghan economy. The scope of Chinese assistance is multidimensional. It will not only help the Afghan government to stand on its own feet, but also

fight against extremism and drug culture in Afghanistan, which have largely benefited the local, regional and trans-regional terror outfits.

Recommendations

1. China has good relations with both the Taliban and the Kabul government, so Beijing can convince both parties to sit at the table to work out a peace transition and the formation of the government as per the wish of the people of Afghanistan.
2. Afghanistan is facing economic problems and after the US withdrawal, Afghanistan will become more serious. China should also increase its financial aid to Afghanistan.
3. Being a regional power China can facilitate peace talks comparatively better than the Taliban and the Afghan regime. Thus, China can win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. This is essential to resolve Afghan issues within Afghanistan between the Afghan government and the Taliban for power.
4. Weak state institutions in Afghanistan are the main hurdle to restoring peace and stability. China can play an important role in helping the future government of Afghanistan when the US exits from Afghanistan. China can make their institutions stronger through expert opinion on technical issues, training and program implementation.

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