



**THE SINO-AFGHAN RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

This paper provides a brief information about history of relations between China and Afghanistan from ancient past to the present era. The collected data relies both on primary and secondary sources. From past to the present China-Afghan relations have always cordial and friendly. Trade relations between both countries date back to the ancient times of Han dynasty 3rd century BC and trade route was the beneficial silk road. Currently both countries have embassies in Beijing and Kabul, and both share a 76 km narrow border. Apart from sharing a border they also share same historical sites and shared same religion and cultural heritage centuries ago. there was a time when some of the well-known provinces of Afghanistan was part of Chinese protectorate. moreover, silk road is another important element which links the two states together. Trade, immigration and cultural exchange have taken place through silk road for centuries between both nations. Not to mention, relations between China and Afghanistan have been smooth till 1933, however, in 1934 it was slightly deteriorated. Still, soon after that it was again back to normal. China has provided Afghanistan millions of dollars in the form of grants and non-reimbursable grants, apart from that a long-term initiative of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan has been planned by China. China is trying hard to make its neighbor state stable politically as well as economically which at last will have positive impacts on the well-being of herself.

Keywords: Afghanistan, China, Dynasty, development,

History

In 102 BC Han dynasty took control over northern regions of the present Afghanistan and later they set up an administration by the name of protectorate of the western regions to control the silk road trade through central Asia. The present-day Afghanistan was known for its contribution to Buddhism. For the very first time Buddhism was spread in China by the Buddhist monks of Afghanistan. Trade relations continued between both nations in Tang dynasty 618 AD as well ("Buddhism - Central Asia and China", n.d.). In 659 some provinces of Afghanistan like, Balkh, Herat, and Kabul became part of the protectorate under the Tang dynasty Emperor Gaozong. During the Mongol empire both regions were briefly merged which led to the improvement of the silk road.

Silk Road

Han dynasty built the silk road in order to have trade relations with Afghanistan (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). The main trade commodities consisted of fruits and tea which was carried through Xinjiang and Wakhan corridor which are located at the borders of both states. Apart from being a mere trade route the silk road was also used for spreading culture, religions, syncretic philosophies and new technologies. Buddhist monks traveled from the area currently known as Afghanistan and preached Buddha's religion in china through the silk road (UNAMA, 2010). through silk road china and Afghanistan could be able to have trade relations with central Asian counties which are now called as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In addition, this

route provided a big market for both nations in modern-day India Pakistan and extended more than four thousand miles to Europe (Omrani, 2010). Though, later the trade was dampened by the crusades.

China-Afghanistan Relations from World War II till 9/11

After ascending the throne in 1933 King Mohammad Zahir Shah he followed the footsteps of his predecessors by continuing to course of modernization and opening relations with European countries. During the World War 2 under the premiership of Mohammad Hashim khan Afghanistan had good relations with axis powers and remained neutral. Afghanistan had some trade and infrastructure assistance treaties with axis powers and improved its relations with them during the war. Afghanistan was one of the first countries which recognized People's Republic of China and it started relations with People's Republic of China in 1955 by posting the first Afghan ambassador Abdul Samad in Peking. The initiative of visiting Afghanistan was taken by Prime Minister of China Zou Enlai and his vice prime minister in January 1957(Reuters staff, 2011). They met the Afghan king Zahir and his Prime Minister Daoud khan and had a discussion with them which led to enhancing cordial relations between both countries. In the month of October of the same year Daoud khan upon the invitation of Chinese Government visited china and met chairman Mao Zedong and vice chairman Zhu De. The boundary treaty was sign by the two above mentioned countries on November 1963 so as to settle the territorial quarrel on the border between Wakhan a village of Badakhshan and Xinjiang province of China. During the Sino-soviet split Afghanistan had neutral relations with its northeastern

neighbor although soon after pro-soviet communist Afghan leaders came into power in Afghanistan the ties with China again declined. At that time the Afghan government supported China. In this scenario China gained weapons from the US to safeguard itself from foreign aggression. China from the beginning adopted a policy of noninterference and non-aggression and always being in favour of problem solving by means of mutual consultation. On one side China follow his footprint and did not recognize the Babrak Kamal's government because he was installed in the result of invasion of Soviet Union on Afghanistan. However, Taliban regime in Afghanistan was supported by China and it was the first non-Muslim country to meet Taliban leader Mullah Omar. After the fallout of Taliban's regime when American troops came to Afghanistan once again Sino-Afghan relations were revived (Sharma, 2011). China took the initiation and send foreign affairs staff to congratulate Hamid Karzai. Afghan president Hamid Karzai visited China on January 2002 (Reuters, 2011) and was offered 1 million us dollars aid by Chinese Government to Afghanistan which was sent by the month of March and Chinese Government further said that they will provide aid worth 150 million dollars for reestablishment of Afghanistan. Chinese embassy was opened in Afghanistan on 6 February 2002.

Chinese Peacekeeping Efforts

With growing Chinese influence in the region, China has also expanded its peacemaking role in Afghan war (Farr,2019). For the first time ever, China played the role of mediator and facilitator between both neighboring countries Afghanistan and Pakistan on 26 December 2017. The trilateral

meeting of the foreign ministers was taken in Beijing and it was made clear that both states will cooperate and coordinate with each other whether in terms of trade or national security. Afghanistan Belt and Road Initiative was discussed and it was decided that China and Pakistan's economic corridor CPEC will be extended to Afghan region. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi launched a shuttle diplomacy between both countries in dispute who accused each other of terrorism and attacks as well as resuscitate in Afghanistan the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's contact team. Not to forget that decades ago during the cold war china tried to become a mediator between Kabul and Islamabad upon the request of Afghan and Pakistani leaders but had no positive results.

Military Cooperation

China and Afghanistan are cooperating with one another in defense field also. China has been providing military aid to Afghanistan since long (Farr,2019). With passage of time this cooperation strengthened between the two countries.

China's Aid and Economic cooperation

Economic development will eventually solve the problem of issues of the conflict-ridden region, where poverty is considered as main evil behind insecurity and instability. China is one of the biggest foreign investors in Afghanistan. It granted aid worth 1 million dollar in 2002 and 30 million dollars in 2003 to Afghanistan. from 2007 onward China has facilitated Afghanistan with technology and telecom equipment. as well as purchased rare mineral rights with the assistance of US. since 2010, China has been

investing 3.5 billion dollars to extract Aynak (copper mines) in some provinces outside Kabul (Hourelid & Blanchard, 2014). from 2012-2013 china lent 240 million dollars to Afghan Government. Kabul was further aided 100 dollars by 2016, also in the same year the first direct train came from China towards Hairataan. as we know that Afghanistan has no access to sea so without help of China it could never be able to build fiber optic cables. China began extraction of oil from Amu Darya basin (Pantucci, 2013) and also planned to build air corridors from Urumqi to Kabul. during Ashraf Ghani's government in 2014 china give Afghanistan a non-reimbursable aid of 81.4 million US dollars and a year later 244 billion dollars for the year 2015-2017. Additionally, 500 scholarships will be provided for Afghan students and 3000 professions will be trained in different fields in China for the coming five years. In spite of, being the huge investor china has failed to achieve its goal in Afghanistan, it could neither made capital out of 3 billion-dollar gains of copper extraction contract nor it could gain profit from building rail and road infrastructure. due to security issues and low export rate China has been unable to fully consolidate Afghanistan as a permanent member state of Shanghai cooperation organization to come up with motivation of regional consensus to operate afghan peace process or even to use multilateral conferences such as the Quadrilateral group cooperation to give a rise to Afghanistan diplomatic peace talks which would lead to reconciliation.

China' s expanding role in Afghanistan

At the present time when the US and international organizations failed to stop the bloodshed in Afghanistan and peace seems as an impossible

factor inside the Afghan territory, Afghanistan must look for an alternate solution out of current instability which is not other than China. Diplomatic relations were established between China and Afghanistan back then in 1950 and it mostly was economic in nature (Pandey, 2019). China's role in Afghanistan was minimal until 1980 soviet invasion anyway its relations became better with Taliban government in 2001. By the time an interim government was formed in Afghanistan both countries decided to revive their 1960's non aggressive friendly relations. There are numerous reasons for Beijing's growing interest in this region.

Political Instability: The political instability in Afghanistan for a long period of time made the situation very complex. The instability galvanized the problems in Afghanistan some may be mentioned as under:

Economic decline: the security crisis had a grave impact on the economy of Afghanistan as not a single citizen is willing to invest in such a country which is marked as the most dangerous country in the world. Most the Afghans have moved their assets to Gulf states, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia. No investment leads to no industries, no job opportunities, no GDP, no purchasing power and more dependency in the global community. On the top of that according to some reports the domestic fiscal revenue has declined from 13.6 % GDP to 10.0% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once hundreds and millions of dollars were brought by the foreign troops to Afghanistan in their 800 bases which has stopped with their withdrawal from the country. It has been estimated that Approximately 200,000 Afghans has lost their jobs in logistics, security

and other sectors of the war-driven state. Poverty and unemployment are widespread in all corners of the country.

Security decline: In spite of US assistance mission, the civilian casualties remain high. 10,392 civilian casualties have been recorded in 2019 and thousands of Afghans have been displaced due to ongoing conflict (Harpviken, 2001). Due to current security issues most of the recently graduated youth seek refuge in European countries. Reports show that in the year 2020 most of the famous personalities in the media were targeted. Four anchors, three reporters and a cameraman have lost their lives in the terrorist attacks.

Political Instability: Throughout the history there always have been a struggle for power in Afghanistan, and this still continues. The Same situation can be seen in the current government, as there have been a struggle of power between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah and this leads to political instability and creation of confusion in the country (Czarnecki.,2020). Not to mention, by the time foreign troops started leaving the political instability worsened.

Dependency: In the past few decades Afghanistan has been dependent on the countries like US, India, Pakistan, China and central Asia. Neither it can provide the basic health and food facilities on its nor can solve the security issues posed to the nation (Czarnecki.,2020). Afghanistan always needs foreign intervention to solve its issues which is the main problem of the state.

Lack of Industries: The number of industries in the country is almost negligible. Almost all of the major commodities are imported from the neighboring countries, mostly from Pakistan and India. This is the main cause that the GDP remains very low and jobs aren't available.

China is playing very positive role in the regional economic development (Pantucci, 2013). Its win-win model is transforming the regional economic panorama with its mega projects like BRI and CPEC.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Belt and road initiative (BRI) often referred as " New Silk Road" or "Golden Road" is one of the progressive infrastructure programs in Asia. It is the biggest and ambitious trade-route connectivity project in the world history and is expanded to 60 countries. It was launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013 (Stone,2019) with the aim of joining east Asia with Europe and to broaden the political and strategic influence of China over the region (Mauk,2019). China is consistently insisting Afghanistan to play the role of central player in central and South Asia. Initially Afghanistan was not included in China's Belt and Road Initiative due to the ongoing conflict inside its territory, yet lately China's interest has developed in Afghanistan and it got more inclined towards including Afghanistan in this project due to the fact that Afghanistan could connect China to the rest of Asia, Europe and East Africa. The gradual rising anticipation of peace In Afghanistan is observed as an opportunity by china to invest in infrastructure, additionally, Afghanistan's Geo-strategic location at the crossroads of region is apposite, being the shortest trade

path between South and Central Asia, China and the Middle East, by which The Arabian Sea can be easily accessed. Afghanistan can be converted into an important connectivity hub and demonstrates potential to become a focal point of BRI. In a trilateral dialogue all three countries, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to build the BRI together which will lead to further strengthening their diplomatic and economic relations (Asim, 2018). It was announced by President Xi that the plan has dual sides i.e., the Overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). Initially both were named as one Belt, one Road Initiative. China has planned to build a vast number of highways, railroads, and overseas shipping routes supported by hundreds of new plants, pipelines and company towns in dozens of countries. According to Asian Development Bank estimation the region is facing an annual financing deficit of 800 billion dollars. It is called the "initiative" by the Chinese government, an attempt to intensify regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future it is seen by some observers as a plan for China to dominate the world by China-centered global trading network.

China's constant efforts to stop terrorism in Afghanistan

The unending war has caused to create a havoc in Afghanistan. Today the state is confronting the largest humanitarian crisis ever seen in the history of South Asia. The main culprit of Afghan war are the Taliban who are not ready to enter into a peace treaty with the Afghan Government so, United States on behalf of Afghan Government started negotiating the future of Afghanistan with them, for the initial decade of Taliban and US war in Afghanistan, China didn't have any involvement in the region (Kuhn,

2009), in the contrary, immediately after the Obama Administration announced the intention of withdrawal of US troops from Afghan territory by 2014, (Panda, 2014) Beijing showed unease by the prospect of instability in its border. Constant terrorist threats compelled China to interfere in its neighboring country therefore, she involved in numerous multilateral initiatives to reach to a peaceful conclusion with Taliban. first meeting occurred in Murree in 2015. Then, a quadrilateral coordination group was arranged among the US, Afghanistan, China and Pakistan. China was also included in Kabul process summoned by president Ghani in 2017 and sent its representatives along with Afghan politicians to Moscow for negotiations with Taliban in 2018. Also, China have had multiple dialogues with Taliban in the recent years. In June, Beijing received a Taliban delegation led by Mullah Baradar who has lately been released of a Pakistani jail. China had its part in two trilateral meetings with Russia and US (Sediqi, 2019) and one trilateral event with Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to promote reconciliation efforts and discuss the possible extension of China-Pakistan corridor CPEC to Afghanistan. there are two reasons for China's growing economic role in Afghanistan, First, an unstable neighbor like Afghanistan which is economically, politically and strategically vulnerable is a threat to China's security and peaceful co-existence (Pandey, 2019). Second, a peaceful Afghanistan would lead China's way towards completion of economic and strategic goals.

China's economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan contains crucial significance for the Peoples Republic of China. according to realist school of thought china, so as to achieve its

long term and short term economic and strategic goals lately is building deeper ties with Afghan nation (Huasheng, 2015). having a secure and politically stable neighbor is the immediate aim of china to achieve but building economic ties and having strategic influence in Afghanistan is the permanent goal of China (Wadsam,2013). apart from china's own interest in cooperation with Afghanistan there is a huge support for China among the common masses and leadership in Afghan nation. If China succeeds in bringing stability in the war-torn region it will be seen as victorious alternative to United States of America. some archaeological sites have been discovered lately in the region which are not only part of Afghan cultural heritage but that of China too. Peoples Republic of China is a communist country which is facing a constant threat of Islamic extremism that's why it's having links with Taliban and Al-Qaeda in order to have things in control and prevent religious extremism inside its country. when Taliban formed their government in Afghanistan, China was anxious about Taliban having relations with anti-Chinese terrorist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and allowing them to operate their camps inside the country in response to that China supported the initial round of sanctions imposed by UN on Taliban government. Later on, Chinese Government realized that improving its relations with Taliban will benefit China strategically as well as economically (Stone,2019), therefore, diplomatic relations initiative with Taliban started with Chinese officials visiting Kabul in 1999 and China's Ambassador in Pakistan sought a meeting with Mullah Omar. The Chinese envoy in a meeting with Mullah Omar in Kandahar by 2000 told him about his deal. The deal was that Taliban should stop giving asylum to Ethnic Uyghur militants operating in

Afghanistan with ETIM. In return, China will recognize the Taliban Government and oppose further UN sanctions. Although this dream did not turn into reality when Mullah Omar stopped ETIM but did not Expel them on the other hand China also didn't oppose the UN sanctions but only abstained from it. In the contrary Chinese firms enlarged their activities in Afghanistan and on 11 September 2001 an MoU was signed by both states to expand economic relations further (Shahid, 2019).

Conclusion

Unlike past, now it is the era of inter-dependency, states are interdependent on one another, and they help one another for the sake of their own interests. In this era of globalization, the trans-border cooperation is one of the main features of the globalized society. China and Afghanistan cooperate with each other for reaching their mutual goals. China in order to enlarge its economy and safeguard its national security is looking forward to turning war-torn Afghanistan into a more stable, secure and developed state. On the other hand, Afghanistan strategic location and its natural resources has considerable attraction for China. China can help Afghanistan in many field of life through the mega project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). And recently some of the Taliban leaders have admitted that BRI will be helpful in reconstruction and development of war ton country, and it has the potential of changing the destiny of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan hope that China can help to a considerable extent to lead Afghanistan from chaos into stability. Both nations have enormous

opportunities at hand that are leading them towards a more robust and close cooperation for achievement of their aims.

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