

China's Interests in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospect of 'One Belt, One Road'

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ABSTRACT

China's Foreign Policy interest in Afghanistan and Central Asia can be analysed in political, economic and defence perspectives. Afghanistan has indeed and distinctively a huge significance in the strategic calculus of China. Geopolitically, Afghanistan has four conspicuous qualities, which include geographical, strategic, political and economic salience. Due to changing rapidly global security architecture, these qualities stipulate deeper cooperation not only between China and Afghanistan but also for the regional cooperation of all the countries keen for regional harmony and peace. It should be based on sovereignty and mutual respect. Afghanistan can serve China's interest in strategic, economic and security terms. Therefore, China shares a border with Afghanistan and shares security challenges either. China is taking a significant interest in the resources and infrastructure of the country. China's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan is not explicit and matured. Beijing's much ambitious projects such as the "One Belt One Road (OBOR)" run through Central Asia to Europe. It needs the security situation to be improved in Afghanistan to benefit from Chinese investment and infrastructure developments. Kabul intends to be a part of these Chinese regional projects. Afghanistan and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on "OBOR". According to an IMF report, "Beijing has allocated some money to Afghanistan from the OBOR fund". Current Chinese foreign policy objective to connect with the west and particularly its western neighbours can go hand in hand with Beijing's embrace of the "Go West" programs, which aims to increase economic development in China's long-neglected western regions. But China's role is unclear in Afghanistan's future. This paper seeks to describe the features of the OBOR project to enhance its economy as well as its impact on Afghanistan in the economic field. It will also analyse the security and other geopolitical aspects of Chinese initiatives and its significance *viz a viz* Afghanistan.

Key Words : Geopolitics, OBOR, Security, Strategic, Geographical, Economic, Go West

INTRODUCTION

China's relations with Afghanistan in the past ten years have largely been amicable in the field of politics, economy and security, but highly functional, particularly in the economic domain. The two countries share a small 75 km boundary called the Wakhan Corridor (Paliwal, 2011:1). Afghanistan is rich with untapped natural resources. Therefore, it holds a significant place in China's strategic calculations. The geopolitics of Afghanistan has four glaring qualities, which include geographical, political, strategic and economic salience. China has initiated its

ambitious "One Belt, One Road (OBOR)" project, which can be beneficial to both the countries. After the 9/11 incident, the US and its coalition forces engaged themselves in countering terrorist groups are having a haven in the Af-Pak region. China had shown limited interest in Afghanistan's reconstructions and development. It wishes to assert itself as the great economic power of the world. Consequently, it requires not only a good relation with its neighbouring countries but also a stable and prosperous neighbour. Afghanistan should be on China's priority list to safeguard its economic and geopolitical interests, which cannot be possible without

stability and peace in the region.

The paper put forth a few hypotheses; firstly, Afghanistan holds an important place in securing Chinese foreign policy interests and aspirations in the region. Secondly, Chinese interests in Afghanistan are largely confined to the economic exploitation of untapped natural resources. Thirdly security concern is one of the biggest challenges in achieving Chinese interests and goals in the region. The research questions which are going to be analysed to understand Chinese interests in Afghanistan would be first, what are the factors that led to Chinese engagement in Afghanistan. Secondly to what extent security concerns pose a threat in achieving Chinese interests in the region. Thirdly how the political and security instability does hinder in achieving the economic interests and lastly what are the other factors that constitute the Chinese interests in Afghanistan. The methodology used in this paper is analytical and largely based on the qualitative method of research. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of China in Afghanistan to understand its economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan.

Geopolitically, both Afghanistan and Pakistan play a vital role in the Chinese government in promoting its business. Afghanistan plays a strategic location for China in the trade route through Central Asia under the OBOR Project via Pakistan. The concept of OBOR based on the ancient Silk route which China has taken as an oriented the initiative to revive through western Chinese province via Central Asia and to end in Europe. The ancient silk routes were the “Northern Silk Road” and the “Southern Maritime Silk Road”. The Northern Silk route used to connect Central Asia and Europe by land, while the Southern Silk route goes through the sea. On a similar pattern, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced to revive these ancient routes in 2013. The new initiative, being modern, will be based on modern railways and pipeline projects.

Arnold Toynbee has described Afghanistan as the “roundabout of the ancient world”. The geopolitics of Afghanistan plays a significant role in Asia that paves the way for China and India to West Asia by land routes. Therefore, it is exactly said that Afghanistan creates a bridge for connecting Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia and East Asia. Therefore, Afghanistan affirms itself as a multi-cultural land. As a result, Chinese civilisation has had its impact on this multi-cultural nation. Afghanistan has been facing invasions and intrusions due to its

geopolitical location which attracted aggressive global powers from Alexander to the former Soviet Union. At present, the U.S and allied forces are struggling to occupy it (Khan, 2015:1). Now, these forces are continuously struggling for winning the heart and minds of Afghans as well as land. But it is going on to date.

Afghanistan is a neighbouring country to China. But, traditionally, Chinese foreign policy had not given it due to prominence. That is why China had not taken it seriously. China has taken an interest in Afghanistan only after the involvement of the United States of America. However, the USA and its allied forces attacked Afghanistan against the Al Qaeda and its supreme commander Osama Bin Laden for a peaceful Afghanistan while China has no such concern except for Afghanistan’s stability. It based on the ‘war on terror’ concept. They involved there for securing their security from terrorism. China intended to make a strong relationship with Afghanistan government subsequently (Bukhari, 2012: 29). Therefore, China has been facing terrorist activities in Xinjiang province through Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been as facing or encountering economic and security challenges. For strengthening these, Ashraf Ghani (the newly elected President of Afghanistan) took an interest in the neighbour countries. He visited China in October 2014, because of China’s optimistic approach towards Afghanistan and also initiated steps towards China. It was the first official visit by the Afghan President to China during Xi Jinping’s presidency. They decided to build an environment for peace, stability and economic prosperity of Afghanistan. After the presidential visit, both the governments initiated bilateral relations. China seems to upcoming to play a significant role in contemporary Afghanistan shortly. Afghanistan looks towards China for strengthening its financial condition and infrastructure development as well as improving its defensive ability while on the other hand; China wants to take advantages of geopolitical location and to protect their project from terrorist attacks. President Xi once said, “A new era of cooperation in China-Afghanistan relations and took development to a new depth and breadth”. President Ghani authorised the Chinese Silk Road project too. He said, “We feel that our vision of Afghanistan as a hub of regional trade, transit, and peace would be an illustration of your vision of East Asia and South Asia cooperation” (Khan, 2015:2). From the above statement, it can analyse that OBOR project is intended to bring closer the presidents of both countries.

China has been spending a huge amount in Afghanistan in the security areas for the success of the OBOR project. Moreover, China also invested a significant fund in humanitarian assistance. For this, China has to face challenges from the western autonomous region (Xinjiang) that is most vulnerable. In which "East Turkistan" is internally creating a threat to stability and security of China. Moreover, Afghanistan's terrorist groups linked ideological and culturally to Xinjiang's fighters and contribute to them. A point to be considered is that Afghanistan government is fully supportive of the Chinese government proposal to pass 'OBOR' project through its territory; on the other hand, the government of Afghanistan is not taking responsibility of the security risks to these projects in the future. It is clear that Afghanistan is totally in a fragile state due to terrorist attacks happening daily. China wants to make long-term investments in business projects in Afghanistan but does not want to invest in security maintenance. Thus, China wishes that Afghanistan should become a peaceful and stable land under the already involved external countries. It will also help the masses in Afghanistan. Chinese projects will boost economic cooperation in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. At this crucial juncture, China has made deep-rooted strategic and economic relations with Afghanistan. It would not only bring economic gains to China because Afghanistan is politically unstable. It would also increase its stature globally (Khan, 2015:2). China also wants to enhance its market all over the World.

China-Afghanistan Relations: A Historical Background:

Historically, China had played a little role in Afghanistan. Relations between these countries had hindered due to regional history, geography and imperial geopolitics before the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Afghan-China border had regular trade difficulties due to local conditions (Ludwig, 2015:40). It was also because of unfavourable relations between these two nations. Moreover, Silk route trade was affected due to criminal activities like robbery of the goods.

The old "Silk Road" started from China and passed via Afghanistan, Central Asia to reach Rome. It established during the Han Dynasty by Chang Chien (140 B.C.). He was a special envoy of Emperor Wu. Initially, the Ta Yueh-Chih people lived in the Kansu area of China under the pressure of the Hsiung-nu tribesmen. Then, the people migrated towards the Oxus River Valley

(presently the Amu Darya) in Central Asia. During the early period of 104 B.C., the special envoy had sent to the Chinese Imperial Court by the Afghan Kingdom; it went through the Silk Road. Goods and crafts from the Middle East also travelled to China through this route (Dai, 1966: 213). This route was very famous and easiest route for sending goods at that time. It connects South Asia to West Asia.

During those days, Chinese pilgrims also started visiting the Afghan-Indian region as it was a hub of the Buddhist learning centres. This trend started in the fourth century and continued in the subsequent period (Dai, 1966: 213). Gradually, Buddhism spread all over China. Afghanistan and Pakistan are Islamic by doctrine. However, some Buddhist centres still exist in Logar province in Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Islam had also spread its influence in the neighbouring provinces of China. Thus, historically the Tajiks (of Tajikistan) and ethnic groups of Xinjiang province of China migrated towards Afghanistan and vice versa. The movement of Uyghurs of Xinjiang and others into Afghanistan's Badakhshan province continues going on. Meanwhile, the Silk Road flourished and reached the high stage during the reign of Zhang Qian, and he also visited western Chinese province (Xinjiang), including Afghanistan's Balkh province. On that time, the old Silk Route was a success mainly because of the strong empires and a stable security situation present in the nearer border regions of neighbouring countries and beyond (Khalil, 2017).

In 1960, China and Afghanistan signed a "Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression Treaty". They called it an initiative of "a new Silk Road". During the Cold War period, China intervened in Afghanistan because the Soviet invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and to spread their communist ideology all over the country. Due to influencing nature of the communist ideology, China supported the United States of America. In 1989, the Soviet Union had declined and withdrew from Afghanistan. After which, China had stopped its support in Afghanistan to the USA. In 1996, the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan. Many countries were in favour of this new regime in Afghanistan. However, the Chinese government did not give importance to this regime. China had stopped all official political relations and functions with Afghanistan, including closed its embassy in Kabul. In 2001, the Taliban regime had declined due to the USA invaded in Afghanistan and fully support for making a

new government in Afghanistan. The newly elected president of Afghanistan is Hamid Karzai. After some time, China again established its official political relations with Afghanistan. Since then, China has been trying to develop its business relations with Afghanistan. Moreover, China also is to secure its commercial interests (Bukhari, 2012: 29) because China is very keen to interest in spreading its business with Afghanistan a very long period.

China's Strategy in Afghanistan:

China's strategic interest in Afghanistan is basically due to three reasons. Firstly, it wants to prevent the spread of Separatism, Islamism and terrorism (so-called 'Three Evils') in its Xinjiang province, influenced by the presence of such forces in Afghanistan. Secondly, its interest to develop economic and commercial links as well as to obtain rights to natural resources. Thirdly, it wants to prevent the rising influence of India and the United States in Afghanistan. First, two of the three reasons require a long-term presence of the US and its allied forces in Afghanistan. The third reason could be possible only if the United States of America and its coalition partners were to leave Afghanistan. After that, China can play a much greater role in the military field (Ludwig, 2015:39). Nevertheless, China is not taking an interest in getting involved in Afghanistan in the security field. It is only supporting the Afghan National Army (ANA) by providing assets and logistical support.

In 2006, China and Afghanistan signed the "Treaty of Good Neighbourly Friendship and Cooperation". Through this treaty, China is aiming the abundant and rich natural resources of Afghanistan to vehicle its rapid industrialisation through resources (Clarke, 2016). The Chinese government promised its support to the Afghan government for bringing stability. Instead, the Afghan government committed to supporting the Chinese government in the fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism, and transnational crimes (Huasheng, 2012:2). China is also anxious about the Uyghur movement and Narco-trade that affects social harmony and negative impacts on people's health. A problem which China cannot ignore (Bhatia *et al.*, 2011: 103). For balancing and gaining benefits from Afghanistan, China has put forward a new project "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR). However, there remains a fundamental incongruity with US interests (Clarke, 2016). Besides it, Beijing's interest lies in Afghanistan for countering India's reconstruction projects and much more by its version of a 'New Silk

Road,' *i.e.* 'OBOR' projects (Price, 2013:5). China's main focus is also to target India's economic growth in the South Asian regions. China has portrayed OBOR as a win-win situation for itself as well as the countries in partnership. No wonder, more than 60 countries have already signed it. Morgenthau in his second principle of the theory of realism states that national interest is always defined in the term of power. Other nations also want to become a powerful country like China. OBOR is not a vision of Xi Jinping to flourish China and other countries as well, but it is a strategic move to control and assert its power in international politics. It is a systematic effort to dwarf India and establish its dominance not only in South East Asia but also in the South and Central Asia (Kacker, 2017:69).

The security threat is a big problem for China especially from the terrorist groups that exist in Afghanistan, Pakistan and its own Xinjiang province. That is why China has been investing a huge amount of money in the fields of natural resources like mines, coal, copper and petroleum. It is also taking an interest in commercial and trade fields in Afghanistan as a measure to balance the security concern through development; as its OBOR projects will only flourish once these security concerns (Kley, 2014: 2). Moreover, China has been providing a large amount of money for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan that can support for enhancement of Afghans life.

China's Economic Interest in Afghanistan: Prospects of OBOR Project:

Afghanistan has suffered a lot of violence during its long history due to several wars. The economic condition is not strong because large parts of the country are mountainous and very little is low land suitable for agriculture. In Afghanistan, a lot of natural resources are unexplored by the Afghan government. The Afghan government is fully dependent on agriculture and foreign aid. Opium cultivation is the largest activity in the country and has the biggest production in the world. However, foreign aid is mainly used by external forces for buying the power and faithfulness of local warlords. Despite, the Afghan government has left a few amounts of foreign aid that uses for the expenditure of government. It has happened due to a high level of corruption in the central government. The government fully depends upon it whereas the people have become unused because they have not a proper job and has government also incapable

of providing job to Afghans. That is why people become incapable of supporting the national government (Barfield, 2010: 10).

Opium production has distorted the revenue of the Afghan government. It also worsens better governance practices. Illegal narcotics and arms trafficking diminish the government's legitimacy and importance of licit infrastructure and mining projects. Furthermore, NATO has grossly distorted the Afghan economy (James, 2013:57). By using some military activities such as bombing and start fighting with the Taliban and Al Qaeda, the crops destroyed not only this, but also many casualties happened in Afghanistan. The environment of Afghanistan became fearful due to that the people could not come out for their work. The economic development became weak because of less collection of revenue from agricultural production.

The primary step of China includes and integrates Afghanistan and Pakistan in the OBOR project. The Afghan government and the Chinese government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on OBOR initiative. According to the IMF report, "Beijing has allocated some money to Afghanistan from the OBOR fund". Moreover, Afghanistan has obtained permanent membership of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in March 2017. AIIB allocates the funds for OBOR. But nothing has surfaced practically. It seems that China is ready to play a bigger role in upcoming years than erstwhile in Afghanistan (Pant, 2014). Consecutively both governments agreed to strengthen economic relations, improving agriculture, building transportation, as well as harnessing natural resources, generating electricity, and constructing roads under the New Silk Road Project (Huasheng, 2012:2). Chinese state-owned enterprises will be responsible for most of these activities. China has been modernising their industries leading to a fast-growing middle class with higher incomes and purchasing power. That is the reason; China is forced to search resources and markets far beyond their borders for sustaining their growth and meet its demands. Not only will it feed the Chinese hunger for raw material, but will boost their exports further.

It seems that the South Asian states are a hub of natural resources such as cobalt, copper, gold, iron, and lithium. Among them, Afghanistan holds the premier position and is rich in unexplored natural resources like minerals and hydrocarbon deposits. Chinese companies have invested billions of dollars in major projects like the

Amu Darya Basin Oil project and Aynak copper mine project (Logar province) in Afghanistan (Gartenstein-Ross *et al.*, 2014: 2). China had made a \$ 3.5 billion investment in this copper field which includes a captive 400MW power plant and rail connection from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. Chinese companies have also ventured into Afghanistan's telecommunication sector in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Communication. China has written off all matured debts owed to it by Afghanistan. In a 25 year pact signed between Afghanistan and China, China's National Petroleum Company is to develop Afghanistan's energy resources, transport infrastructure and refining capacity. The company has already kicked off production at the Amu Darya oil field in northern Afghanistan under this pact (Dubey, 2016:344). These projects are supposed to generate domestic revenues for the Afghan government. In the 'New Silk Road' project, the Chinese consortium had promised \$ 2.9 billion of investment in transportation services of Afghanistan. The 'New Silk Road' initiative would construct better facilities of roads, railways, maritime route and pipelines that connect to Central Asia, Middle East Asia, South Asia and South East Asia. One of the best examples is the linking of Aynak copper mine project to the Khyber Pass (in Pakistan) by road. The World Bank estimates, "the mine would generate annual revenue of \$250 million for Afghanistan. Moreover, it creates more than 70,000 jobs in supply and services and 5,000 directly at the mine" (Ruttig, 2015).

Chinese companies were involved in the construction process as well as digging in refinery field and pass petroleum pipeline and trading goods through Gwadar port in Baluchistan (Pakistan) (James, 2013: 22). A pipeline connects this port to Xingjian province. China has invested \$200 million in upgrading this port. It is currently being used to mine lead and zinc in south-west Pakistan (Dubey, 2016:344). It stands at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz that extends across the oil routes from the Middle East. This location is also ideal as the trans-shipment hub for Afghanistan and Western China (Bhatia *et al.*, 2011: 124-125). China would access to petroleum resources via this pipeline to fuel China's growing economy. The Chinese government is also starting to construct rail links and highway in Pakistan that will connect China's interior to the sea. It will enable the movement of Chinese goods from the interior part of China to the sea and further access to international markets. China is heavily involved in building a

hydroelectric dam in Pakistan to alleviate energy shortages (James, 2013: 22). In the present circumstances, China has been free-riding on the American security guarantee in the region to exploit economic opportunities in both Afghanistan and Pakistan with little cost to itself (Jacob, 2010: 222). China's investment in various projects can be fruitful as a response to the US security presence.

Xinjiang of China holds untapped natural resources some of the two-fifths of China's coal mine, one-quarter of its petroleum and one-seventh of its oil. It confirmed that holds 17.4 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves (Pantucci, 2010:22). The Chinese government has concentrated towards this province and started 'Go West' programme. In this programme, the Chinese government will work on developmental projects for people of Xinjiang. That will support the Chinese government for extracting natural resources from this region.

Prospect of China's OBOR Project:

OBOR is one among the most ambitious projects of Chinese President Xi Jinping. This term came into prominence during the Chinese President's visit to Astana (Kazakhstan) in 2013. He speeched about new Silk Road initiative and coined the term "Silk Road Economic Belt" which describe the trade, economic corridor and infrastructure (Clover and Ju, 2017). It is a land-based project that aimed at connecting China via Central Asia to Western Europe (Kacker, 2017:68). Next month, he visited Indonesia and announced the "21st Century's Maritime Silk Road". It is a sea-based project that aimed at connecting China to South-East Asia, Africa and Central Asia (Kacker, 2017:68). It is also to be recreated on the lines of land-based Eurasian Silk Road, out from China's ports to the seas. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor (CMRC), Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor and a New Eurasian Landbridge traded corridors that have increasingly discussed over the new few months. Indeed, the CPEC corridor is only one corridor that had agreed before Astana speech (Pantucci web, 2016). It aims to build roads, rails, ports, pipelines and other infrastructure across Eurasia to enhance trade links in a modern version of the Silk Road (Clover and Ju, 2017).

Afghanistan will regain its historic role in 'OBOR' initiative as a road linkage between South Asia, Middle East Asia, Central Asia and Eurasia (Price, 2013:5). The CPEC has a side project of the New Silk Road initiative

that stretches from Kashgar to Gwadar. The budget of OBOR is \$45.6 billion (Ruttig, 2015). The CPEC can describe as "Higher than Mountain, Deeper than Ocean", gave Sino-Pak ties a new dimension. Sino-Pak signed 51 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in different fields. It begins with the economic and technical cooperation (Pande, 2015: 18). It will support in strengthening economic for developing Pakistan and Afghanistan. Technical cooperation will also support these countries to come closer to the global market to fuel the growing Chinese economy.

CPEC will play a significant role in peace and stability for Pakistan. The aim of projects is energy generation and making a strong communication network for mobility of goods and services. It will reinforce the efforts by Pakistan government to counter extremism and terrorism through economic uplift of least developed areas of Pakistan (Sivia, 2017). In April 2015, China's President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan to discuss the amount of its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the last ten years thrice. As per the details of CPEC projects plan, the Chinese banks and government will give \$15.5 billion loans to the big Chinese companies for investing in coal, hydropower, wind, and solar projects. The projects will start in 2017. It will also add 10,400 MW of electricity to Pakistan's national grid. CPEC's budget is \$75 billion, which is to become operational by 2020. It requires construction new roads, railway line (1,800 km), oil pipelines network connecting Kashgar (western Xinjiang region) to the Gwadar port (Pakistan), and an airport at the port. It is a string of energy projects, dry ports, special economic zones (SEZ) and other infrastructure (Pande, 2015: 20).

During the second term of former President Hamid Karzai, Trilateral Cooperation initiated in Afghanistan, China and Pakistan. The aim of the cooperation is security-based policies. They should cooperate multilaterally. This cooperation is good on paper, but in practice, the state policy of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan hinders such cooperation (Khalil, 2017 b). While OBOR project, CPEC, and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) can promote multilateral cooperation besides politics and security matters (Khalil, 2017 a).

Mr Xi also announced the creation of a China-Russia Regional Co-operation Development Investment Fund, which would eventually amount to another \$15 billion. This fund promotes to link China's north and Russia's

far east. Other funds come from the China Development Bank which will set up three credit lines amounting to \$37.9 billion to develop OBOR projects. Moreover, the Export-Import Bank of China will also set up two lending schemes amounting to \$19 billion (Clover and Ju, 2017).

Ekil Hakimi (Afghan Finance Minister) attended the BOAO Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2017 in China. He said that "We have already aligned most of our domestic plans according to OBOR initiative". Hekmat Khalil Karzai (the Deputy of Foreign Minister) said that "OBOR is a very important step towards regional cooperation, regional and inter-regional connectivity". China is primarily aiming for searching new markets for Chinese goods and expanding its economic power. It will also bring great economic opportunities for countries. OBOR initiative will facilitate Afghanistan to pursue economic stability by enhancing trading opportunities. It connects through regional rail and road networks. It will also emerge crucial partners in the regional energy market and support to fight the regional narcotics trade (South Asian Monitor web, 2017).

The leading financial bodies of 'OBOR initiative' are two such as the Chinese Development Bank (CDB) and the Chinese government. The CDB will invest \$890 billion in more than 900 projects. The Chinese government has also declared a \$40 billion Silk Road Fund to invest in this project. This mega project will cover more than 60 countries as well as Afghanistan (South Asian Monitor, web 2017). It provides both equity and debt financing to support infrastructure, energy, industrialisation, and financial cooperation that will connect the Chinese economy with the rest of the World (China Briefing, 2017). These sixty countries will also extend their business through this project and strengthen its economies in the upcoming future. They will connect with Chinese goods and market.

Security Challenges towards OBOR Project:

Afghanistan is fast becoming the strategic ground due to conflict of interests among global players such as China, Russia, the United States and India. It will have huge reverberations for regional security and peace (Mohanty, 2017). China will not be interested in filling the security vacuum left after the U.S. withdrawal. Though, China's commercial projects will help Afghanistan's economy. China has protected itself from the repercussions of the instability in Afghanistan. But, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) is facing the direct

impact of ethnicity, religion, and terrorism. Tension has emerged in the society of Afghan due to these factors for their interest. It has created terrorist and separatist elements in Afghanistan. These elements threaten the GoA. As a result, these factors affected significantly for shaping the degraded structure of Afghanistan (James, 2013: 37). However, Afghanistan's government has given assurance to the Chinese government for constructing and protecting of OBOR project in future. But it is not in a position to provide security to these projects because Afghanistan is a fragile country. All the department of Afghanistan is not functioning properly due to corruption and terrorist threat. Afghanistan government has been taking security assistance from the U.S. and its allied forces. Then how will it meet the security demands of these projects? China's post-2014 policies are not designed to prevent the Taliban's resurgence. (Gartenstein-Ross *et al.*, 2014: 3). China has been focusing on the Afghanistan government and not thinking about the terrorist threat. It can analyse that Afghanistan and Pakistan border is porous through which terrorist entered into one country to other countries without any disturbance. That is why the OBOR project would have to face such challenges.

Security is one of the basic elements of the OBOR project. Without security, none of the projects will become successful. OBOR project goes across a significantly wide area. Since the project starts from Xinjiang, achieving its stability is of prime concern for China. China has spent a huge amount of funds on security and economic policy for the region. Simultaneously, Beijing is also trying to promote stability in Afghanistan through OBOR project. So, the Chinese government's goal could be fulfilled to provide stability in both Xinjiang and Afghanistan (James, 2013: 37).

The Chinese government seems highly worried about these security concerns. As we know, Afghanistan is a fragile country. The condition of the Afghan Government is not very strong due to corrupt practice; state machinery has failed in controlling corruption, drug trafficking; thus, in securing the country. These things promote poverty in the country. The education system is traditional that do not promote jobs in this globalised era. It creates unemployed people who tend easily to join terrorist groups for the fulfilment of family requirements. These conditions have made the Taliban stronger in Afghanistan. OBOR creates jobs for the unemployed people of Afghanistan. But this is not a permanent solution to the current situation.

Besides, it also supports generating financial revenue for the country. Xinjiang is the focal point of a new outreach designed to both central government political, strategic and economic objectives in Central Asia as well as in the province itself (Jacob, 2014:7).

Chinese Uyghur nationalists receive strong moral and material support from Afghan terror groups, and some of them had even exiled to Afghanistan many decades ago. They have continued to fight their battles against the Chinese government for their independence from Afghanistan (Singh, 2002). Some of the militant groups like “East Turkistan” organisation have functioned in Xinjiang province along with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The relation between them precedes the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. In the period of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, this linkage became even more strong and obvious. Afghanistan became the regional centre of terrorism and extremism. Besides, Afghan terrorist groups ideologically and culturally connected with the people of Xinjiang. That is why they have been supporting them. “East Turkistan” is the most dangerous threat to stabilisation and security of China’s most vulnerable province, i.e. Xinjiang. Afghanistan became a reliable base camp for the “East Turkistan” organisations. The Taliban was the spiritual agitator and material supplier to “East Turkistan”. They provide training to the fighters of “East Turkistan” and supply them with weapons as well as shelter those who fled China. In return, it will continue to encourage the “East Turkistan” organisation. China considers Afghanistan as an inseparable part of building Xinjiang’s security (Huasheng, 2012:4). The connection between East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Afghan Taliban create some challenges for China (Clarke, 2015).

China has been negligibly involved in security efforts in Afghanistan. Beijing has chosen to let the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the United States endure the bulk of the burden. China has provided an only minimal contribution in the field of technical assistance and training to the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Moreover, China promise to economic assistance to Afghanistan has been relatively small (Gartenstein-Ross *et al.*, 2014: 2). OBOR and CPEC project are huge multilevel projects. It needs heavy security for its operations. China is assuming that the USA and its coalition forces will continue to stay in Afghanistan and that will provide security for its projects

from the Taliban and other terrorist groups. China knows that terror activities have been proliferating towards Afghanistan. China has a hard task of protecting these projects from terrorist activities happening in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If China builds good relations with them, there would be lesser incidents of terrorist attacks on these projects.

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA). He stressed that “(We) need to innovate our security concept, establish new regional security cooperation architecture, and jointly build a road for the security of Asia that is shared by and win-win to all”. He also expressed that “development is the foundation of security, and security the precondition for development. For most Asian Countries, development means the greatest security and the master key to regional security issues”. Through this idea, it is the best way of resolving social problems of the Xinjiang province (Fruzsina, 2017; Gartenstein-Ross *et al.*, 2014: 6). The coastal and western region still lagged far behind the rest of the mainland in economic and social development and Public services (Huang, 2007). That is why the Chinese government has started a “Go West” Programme. The government has pumped a huge amount of money for infrastructure projects.

Moreover, Chinese companies are motivated by the Central government to relocate their production and functions into the inner and western regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet. Xinjiang province is a very tense situation. The central government expect that this programme will mollify the Uyghur minority living in Xinjiang province while strengthening its control and national unity (Fruzsina, 2017; Gartenstein-Ross *et al.*, 2014: 6).

At the present scenario, the Taliban has weakened and slowly fragmenting in itself. Thus, this is not a favourable time for China to engage in peace talks with the Taliban. In this situation, the peace talk is possible with the Islamic State rather than direct engagement with the Taliban. The Chinese government only believes that Afghanistan should be peaceful, stable and should have a strong government. But China never gets directly in talks with the Taliban and some militant groups in Xinjiang province also. Afghanistan gets electricity from Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Recently, the Taliban has cut the power lines from these Central Asian countries. Through this activity, the Taliban showed their

hegemony and power in Afghanistan. Thus, the militant's groups are explicitly threatening areas that China intends to develop through the Silk Road (Fruzsina, 2017). It means that the Taliban will create more problems for these projects in the coming future.

Both China and the United States relations have been created a major problem to recognise areas in which the interests of both countries overlap for "mutual benefit" more than they diverge. China's OBOR strategy looks for enhanced economic connectivity with Eurasian countries through a "Silk Road Economic Belt" and a "Maritime Silk Road". These areas have seen holding positive potential capacity now (Clarke, 2015). Before the OBOR initiative, the USA government has already commenced its "New Silk Road Initiative" in 2011. The purpose of this initiative was to make Afghanistan a north-to-south economic corridor between South Asia and Central. Since then administration officials have regularly argued, "China's OBOR initiatives are mutually reinforcing of U.S. efforts to support peace, stability, and prosperity through the enhancement of economic opportunity and connectivity in the least-economically integrated region in the world today". From this point of view, China shares Washington's desire to see a secure and stable Afghanistan. Moreover, Beijing's primary concerns with Uyghur terrorism in Xinjiang (Clarke, 2015). It seems that China's OBOR project is developing in Afghanistan under the supervision of the USA and allied forces.

OBOR Project and its impact on India:

CPEC projects are countering India's security by land and maritime route strategically. Due to this, India takes the defence of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, very seriously (Jacob, 2015: 155). Guang writes that "China has traditionally maintained friendly relations with Afghanistan, while Pakistan is a long-term ally of China". Therefore, Pakistan can support China for hedging against India (Ludwig, 2015:41).

For targeting India, China has made strategic cooperation with Pakistan through the CPEC project. This cooperation centrally focused on strengthening Pakistan through Chinese dual Silk Road plans maritime and overland, which would automatically help in countering India. From an Indian perspective, the most serious strategic challenge comes from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This corridor is very important for China since it passes through India's

periphery, Gilgit-Baltistan. India claims it as a part of the former princely state Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The strategic implication of the project is that the Kashmir is being used for military purposes by China and Pakistan (Pande, 2015: 19). China had continued to support Pakistan's struggle for Kashmir as also contributed in Pakistan's wars with India. Even when most other major powers decided to impose arms embargoes on India and Pakistan; China continued its supplies and support to Pakistan right through those wars. China is the most reliable ally of Pakistan since the early 1960s. In its initial years, Pakistan allied with anti-China western military alliances and that Pakistan has also failed to rein-in Islamic influences from abetting violence in Xinjiang (Singh, 2003: 73). But, the current scenario, both China and Pakistan again became a good friend because the United States has stopped funding to Pakistan. It can analyse that Pakistan's economic conditions are not in better conditions that can satisfy the fulfilment requirement of administration's demands of the state. It required sufficient financial assistance to run the administration in the right direction. That is why China inclined towards Pakistan against India.

India does like to take an interest in Afghanistan the New Silk Road project. India boycotted the Belt and Road summit in China because the core concerns about this project relate to "sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Clover and Ju, 2017). India even called the OBOR initiative "a new kind of colonisation". Therefore, India did not send a high-level delegation to the OBOR summit. Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Gopal Bagley explained, "No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns about sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Releigh, 2017). That is why India is still committed to continuing extending its all feasible support to Afghanistan to meet various challenges. India also wants to convey their message to the neighbouring countries by their works that have been going in Afghanistan. India will remain engaged in the country's reconstruction activities (Pant, 2014). Moreover, India has also engaged in military training and provided weapons and helicopters to security perspective.

India and China disagree over peace-building measures in Afghanistan because of both countries do want to involve security issues. China has strong opposition stand against Indian demands to initiate talks with the Afghan Taliban. India reiterated its concern about terror activities proliferating from Pakistan. India called

for concerted efforts to prevent “safe havens or sanctuaries to any terrorist group or individuals in countries of this region” as a prerequisite of stability in Afghanistan (Mohanty, 2017). India and China have to think about this region because terrorist camps exist here. It is the place where terrorist groups trained new militants and sent to India and other parts of the world. It is a matter of anxious for China’s OBOR projects.

Conclusion:

The geographical location of Afghanistan and its natural resources give Kabul a lucrative position. It will also play a dynamic role in the development and building of the OBOR initiative. This project is a sign of hope for Afghanistan. If the Afghan government could grasp this opportunity; the Afghan Nation will see a great change. Main positive aspects of OBOR for Afghanistan will be creating employment and availability of electricity. It also leads to less dependent upon foreign aids. Modernisation of the infrastructure and industrialisation will further lead to the modernisation of local life. Thus, it might lead to alienation from the orthodox ways of living. On the other hand, security and peacebuilding process is necessary for the establishment of the OBOR project in Afghanistan (China Briefing, 2017). For balancing this, China has to come forward to make better relations with the Afghan government as well as warlords and tribal leaders who control all resources of Afghanistan.

OBOR Project will certainly boost China’s foreign trade leading to the growth of the Chinese economy. Moreover, China is trying to create hegemony and industrial monopoly through this project in the global market. This project will certainly ruin the local markets of the other countries. Moreover, this is one of the projects through which China can better its relations with the neighbouring countries, for sorting out the security issues in Xinjiang. It is the project where China needs to work in collaboration with the US as it is they who are handling security in Afghanistan. If China can involve itself positively with the US on one hand and terrorist groups, on the other hand, this might be a win-win project for China.

The Project will put India under even more pressure, as it needs to balance this huge project by engaging more with the neighbouring countries especially Afghanistan. This project will involve more investment and develop stronger cultural ties with them.

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