

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan: An Overview

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Shanghai Cooperation Organization became a permanent international organization when a new member Uzbekistan joined it in 2001. This group has eight permanent members; China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India. In the initial years the *raison d'être* of the group was to resolve border issues between China and the Central Asian Republics, which emerged after the disintegration of USSR. All the border issues were settled among these states, and thus the scope of the organization has shifted towards security collaboration such as non-traditional security challenges, i.e. terrorism, extremism, separatism, organized crimes and narcotic control. It is indeed pertinent to mention here that the leadership of China and Russia were keen in maintaining the internal security as the most imperative challenge. In this connection emphasis was to address the threat of the so-called 'three evils: terrorism, extremism and separatism. This article will analyze the role of SCO in Afghanistan imbroglio since the formation of this organization.

Keywords: SCO, terrorism, WOT, Afghanistan

Afghanistan: Divergent Geopolitical Scenario

The history of Afghanistan aptly illustrates its key role in the regional geo-politics. Allama Muhammad Iqbal called Afghanistan "the Heart of Asia", because of its importance during the Great Game. The then British Indian Viceroy Lord Curzon considered Afghanistan as "the cockpit of Asia" (Rashid, 2000). A landlocked country, Afghanistan is located at the juncture of West, South and Central Asia. Due to its geographical importance it is considered to be a proxy battleground for the great powers US, Russia, China and also the regional powers India, Pakistan and Iran. The geo-political security of the country is very complicated since the time of "Great Game," of 19th century, which was played on this territory between the Great British and Tsarist Russia. In the 20th century this game was renewed and the players also changed, i.e. America and the Soviet Union. In the 21st century more players entered the game that is the reason why it is called as the "New Great Game," where more strategic players entered, like US, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran and all of these countries have divergent of interests. Even some of the neighbours 'exported' their own conflicts into Afghanistan, such as Pakistan and India (Rubin & Armstrong, 2003). After 9/11 instability in Afghanistan has continued to affect regional security in both Central and South Asia thus makes

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stability in Afghanistan a major challenge for the international community, being a source of almost all the regional problems.

War on Terrorism and Afghanistan after 9/11

The World Trade Centre and the Pentagon were allegedly attacked by the Al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001 in which close to three thousand people died. In response the US launched a military campaign i.e. War on Terrorism (henceforth WOT) in Afghanistan, and its bordering areas. The Taliban regime had allegedly provided shelter to the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden (Coll, 2004). This drive completely changed the geo-political equation of the region (Bakshi, 2002). The overthrow of the Taliban regime and the installment of a new government in Afghanistan provided an opportunity to invite the international community, including the UN, to support and sustain American political and military efforts. To curb terrorist activities and sanctuaries, 'Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)' was launched. It was also planned to renovate of Afghanistan military, economic and political infrastructure.

America called upon different Afghan representatives on December 5, 2001 to deliberate on the future political set up in Afghanistan. Chairman of the Afghanistan interim administration, Hamid Karzai, became the new President of the country after the 2005 presidential elections. With the appointment of Hamid Karzai, the international community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) paid attention to the development of Afghanistan (Emadi, 2010).

The event of 9/11 has also changed the security and geopolitical conditions of Central Asia. Both Russia and China saw the American presence in the region as a threat to their regional security. Similarly, the hidden geopolitical goals of the US behind its military presence in Afghanistan were also important. US have expanded its influence under the pretext of countering terrorism, which has been manifested by establishing military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (Mansourov, 2003). In this way, the US monitored and constrained China as they viewed it a strategic competitor (Wenjiang, 2002). The US is also trying to prevent Russia from re-establishing its control of Central Asia to protect its independence, to monitor the Chinese activities and to contain Iranian influence in the region (Cutler, 2001). Besides security interests, the US has also an economic agenda, and its desire to access Central Asian resources through Afghanistan (Khan, 2012).

Terrorism and the SCO Agenda

On the establishment of SCO organization, terrorism has been labeled as one of the 'three evils' as highlighted in the declaration of its establishment. The fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism remained the central agenda of SCO during its annual meetings and summits. Only two months prior to 9/11, the SCO member states had also adopted the "Convention on Combating terrorism, separatism and extremism". The period of 9/11 was also vital for the SCO member states as they have already been facing the problems of terrorism. Different extremist groups, like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb-ul-Tahrir, the Islamic Renaissance Party, the United Islamic Jihad Union, Tajik Opposition Group and Taliban, have all been active in the region.

9/11 and SCO

Soon after the 9/11 event SCO prepared statement to condemn the attack but was much slower to coordinate. The reason was that SCO at that time was institutionally underdeveloped and was not in a position to offer any practical help. However, some of the SCO members engaged with the US bilaterally to support the WOT. The significant shift in the Russian policy occurred when on

24th September the Russian President Vladimir Putin after conversation with his top brass foreign and security policy advisors announced his government supports for the US in its WOT. Soon the Russian government would provide intelligence sharing and the use of its airspace in a plea for humanitarian and combat assistance. Central Asian Republics also provided similar kinds of airspace access to the American flights (Caldwell, 2011). Earlier the US have limited influence and presence in region except the multinational exercises under NATO (PFP) programme. For Uzbekistan (Wright and Tyson, 2005) it was an excellent opportunity to develop security relations with the US by offering Karshi-Khanabad (K2) military airbase. Its aim was two pronged i.e. to gain financial support from the US and to have a partner in its fight against the IMU militants and other groups like Hizb-u-Tahrir which received sanctuary and help from the Taliban ruled Afghanistan (Rahimove, 2013). Due to the strong bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and US, it is said that the base right to the later was given without consulting the SCO members. It is pertinent to mention here that SCO is not a military organization whereas its member can manage their military bilateral relations with other countries (Boyko, 2018). In this regards the government of Kyrgyzstan also offered the services of Manas airbase to the US. The Kyrgyz base had allowed the US ground troops, aircraft and helicopters along with the purpose of humanitarian and rescue operation (Sestak, 2003). However the Russian and Chinese have grave concerns over the prolonged settlement of US bases in Central Asia. It is like killing two birds with one stone, fighting against terrorism and securing energy resources in Central Asia (Kleveman, 2003). To restore its influence the Russian government also established airbase at Kant which is in a short distance from Manas (Johnson, 2004). On the other hand the honeymoon of US and Central Asia relations remained for a short time (Human *Rights Watch*, 2005).

After the SCO Astana Summit 2005, the US was requested “to define the end terms of their use” of base in Uzbekistan (SCO Astana Summit, 2005). Uzbekistan used the SCO for cover in justifying its subsequent demand of vacation of US forces from Khanabad airbase. After the uprising and massacre in Andijan in 2005 the Uzbek regime became one of the main supporters of SCO, security cooperation. The organization reiterated that the US bases were not meant to be permanent and were only installed to assist the US led war in Afghanistan (Jalolov, 2016). While this request was mainly attributed to Russia and China but Uzbekistan was also supposed to have had a hand in the declaration because of the US criticism of Andijan massacre. Karimov feared that the US support forces could topple down his government. The joint move by Russia and China from the SCO platform shows their influence in the region and a more confrontational approach towards the US. Consequently after the Summit the RATS was established under the banner of SCO.

Narcotics Trafficking and Afghanistan: SCO Response

United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) in 2009 reports stated that Afghanistan produced world’s 92% opium cultivation of which 900 tons of opium and 375 tons of heroines were transported all the way to Europe, Russia, China and Pakistan (Jalalzai & Jefferess, 2011). The drug created \$65 billion market with 15 million addicts which causing 100,000 deaths per year (UNODC, 2017) and funding criminal groups, insurgents and terrorists in Ferghana Valley and other problematic regions. According to estimates 85% of the opium was cultivated in those areas of Afghanistan where the Taliban had strong influence.

To control drugs and puppy, the United Nations established Afghanistan-UNODC Law Enforcement projects that meant to help the Law enforcement community of Afghanistan for controlling internal and external drug trafficking. Besides the Counter Narcotics Police Afghanistan (CNP-A) was also established as an independent body within the organizational structure of the

Afghan National Police that worked under the Interior Ministry. It was assumed that many of the Afghan officials within the government were engaged in drug trafficking (Risen, 2008).

The drug industries not only affected the internal security of the country but it had a greater impact on other countries as well. It is also one of the major sources of funding the militants who sought to disrupt the security situation of the entire region. For instance Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbaddin Hekmatyar derived most of the finance and funding from the heroin industries. In this way they were trying to secure their position, recruits new fighters and buy weapons (Domínguez, 2016).

Politically many of the Afghan elites had deep ties into the heroin industries to secure their position in state affairs (Kerry, 2010). Economically, the heroin industries had created an alternative economy that is not fed into the country's economic indicators but largely deposited abroad. It also created a food shortage as most of the land was used for the production of poppy crops (Mansfield, 2016).

During the Tashkent Summit 2004, a declaration was made by the SCO members to fight 'the narcotics, psychotropic drugs and their precursors'. To create a region wise awareness and response against the illegal drugs production, it was a good move by the SCO members. The SCO had also criticized the NATO for failing to curb and suppress the narcotics trafficking in Afghanistan (Dushanbe Declaration of the Head of the Member States of the SCO, 2008). The 2004 Tashkent Summit of SCO also declared to establish coordinating Council of Afghanistan to supervise efforts on the implementation of border control and interdiction measures against narco-trafficking. This cooperation strengthened in subsequent years as evident in the creation of anti-drug belt on the Afghan border proposed by the Russian President Putin. At this occasion the head of the Executive Committee of RATS, Kassymov said that SCO was ready to actively cooperate in the development and implementation of special programs of assistance to the war turn Afghanistan. Such programs will boost and stabilize the socio-economic situation of the country (Dash, et al., 2014). Since the creation of RATS, SCO made tremendous progress on controlling drug trafficking. Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) and RATS signed a protocol on 27th September 2010, in lieu of combating trans-border drug activities and crime, narcotics trafficking and subsequent terrorist related financing (Protocol on Cooperation between RATS SCO and CARICC Signed, 2010).

SCO Afghanistan Contact Group (SCO-ACG)

SCO-ACG was established in 2005 summit during Astana Summit. The aim of SCO-ACG was to increase mutual cooperation between the organization and Afghanistan on diverse issues of common interest. The summit stated that "the Contact Group between the SCO and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is established with the purpose to elaborate proposals and recommendations on realization of cooperation between SCO and Afghanistan on issues of mutual interest" (Tanrisever ed, 2013). Since its creation Afghanistan is regularly participating in the SCO-ACG meetings. The president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai, while speaking to the Bishkek Summit in 2007 stressed the member countries to focus on the fight against the drugs production and it's trafficking, as it posed serious threats to the peace and stability of the entire region (Khan, Personal Interview).

The ACG consisted of permanent member countries of the organization secretariat, officers working in the secretariat and the diplomats of Afghanistan working in the embassy in China. In case of utter need the officials working in other SCO bodies could also take part in the meeting of ACG. The member countries of the organization especially Russia and Central Asian Republics appealed for a constructive role of SCO in Afghanistan. They urged to assist and support the country in the

reconstruction, demilitarization and also to facilitate the farmers to cultivate other crops instead of poppy. In this regard the Russian President, Putin called for a special conference on the reconstruction scenario of Afghanistan which was held on 27 January 2009 in Moscow. This conference was attended by the permanent members of the organization, observer states and dialogue partners. Also the Secretary General of UN along with Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mark Perrin de Brichambaut, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Patrick Moon and NATO Deputy Secretary-General Martin Howard attended this conference. The representative of more than 36 countries along with their foreign ministers participated in this conference. SCO drew more attention around the world especially after this conference (<http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=98>).

Leonid Moiseev the Russian President to the SCO stated that the organization has earned the right to be considered as a powerful international organization. He further stated that SCO is the most appropriate forum for discussions and consultations on Afghan issue, because it brings all Afghanistan's neighbors together" (Radyuhin, 2009). This highlighted the development of mutual approach within the SCO towards the various challenges the region faced with connection to Afghanistan (Aris, 2011). After the conference arms supply was resumed and later it provided \$220 million worth of military equipments to Afghan National Army (*Mili-Urdu*). More, he argued that Russia would support the US-led forces in Afghanistan along with other activities for normalizing the situation (Radyuhin, *The Hindu*, 2009).

Talking on that occasion the foreign minister of Afghanistan, Rangin Dadfar Spanta said, that drug trafficking was very serious problem not only to Afghanistan but also to its neighbours. He urged for the international community to cooperate and curb this menace and suggested that the SCO members should work together to convert Afghanistan into the bridge of trade and economic activities. The conference called for joint operation against terrorism, narcotics control and other crimes. It was also decided to invite relevant departments to take parts in joint law enforcement exercises and training would be provided to the Afghan drug agencies and the borders control would be improved. It was a road map to bring the war turn country into the SCO fold. Diplomatically this conference was very important for Russia and on the other hand it was also a great victory for SCO in terms of controlling the non-traditional security challenges as well as drug trafficking. This conference also reaffirm, SCO as the most important regional security organization(Ibid).The next summit of SCO was held in Yekaterinburg which further enhanced the importance of the organization with a focus on bringing peace and development to Afghanistan (Roy, 2010).

As stated earlier SCO as an organization opposed intervention in the internal affairs of any country as it believed in 'Harmonious World' and the promotion of new security concept. New Security concept aimed to establish progressive and alternative non-Western World order (Panda, 2012).The SCO declaration of 2012 states: (SCO, website, 2012).

The member states share the view that it is important to promote a new security concept featuring mutual trust ,natural benefit, equality and coordination of international affairs and build an indivisible security space in the world where the interest of all countries are respected.

The reapproachment and settlement of Afghanistan should be Afghan led and Afghan centered. The international community should come forward to establish peace in Afghanistan according to the UN objectives. A very important development in this regards was that the Taliban also wished that SCO should play greater role in bringing peace and stability to the Afghan quagmire.

For instance in October 2009 Taliban sent an open letter to the Afghanistan's Islamic Press which was later forwarded to the international forums. This letter stated that the Western military created all this mess in Afghanistan. It further stated that the NATO forces were psychologically ill and they saw a suicide bomber in every man, woman and child. In this critical juncture the SCO should take positive steps against the NATO and ISAF presence and to stand upon the colonial invasion of Afghanistan (BBC Monitoring South Asia, 13.10.2009).

Afghanistan Quagmire: The Six plus Two-contact group

In 1997, the Uzbek President Islam Karimov proposed peaceful dialogue among the countries that bordering Afghanistan i.e. Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan plus the US and Russia under the aegis of UN. This forum was important in a way that it has brought Iran into the dialogue with US and Afghanistan directly, and secondly, it visualized that the peace was possible only when the countries of the whole region cooperate (Daly, Outside View, 5 November 2009). Both the organization shared similar interest to secure Afghanistan from the terrorist threat.

Heart of Asia Conference on Afghanistan

The Heart of Asia conference meant to arrange platform for regional countries to discuss and formulate peace process with Afghanistan and the region as a whole. It was a joint initiative between Turkey and Afghanistan in 2011 to improve regional cooperation for peace and stability particularly in Afghanistan and generally in the region through mutual cooperation and dialogue (Rahim, 2015). Along with Turkey other countries like China, India, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, CARs, UK, Japan, US and France as well as international organization like UN, NATO, SAARC, OIC and SCO also took part. All these agreed that the problem of Afghanistan should be solved through confidence building measures and political consultation that involved regional as well as extra regional countries (Sharma, 2015). The forthcoming meetings were held in Kabul, Almaty, Beijing and Islamabad respectively. All these conferences verified that Afghanistan was the heart of Asia and if there was any problem in the Afghanistan the entire region would be affected. The Indian Minister of External Affairs also stated that the heart could not function if arteries were clogged (*Dawn*, 2015). All the participants of the conference agreed on comprehensive framework to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region, which was quietly possible through political dialogues and economic linkages between Afghanistan and the region.

Afghanistan-Pakistan-US-China Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)

6QCG is composed of four states namely US, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This group emerged during the Heart of Asia Ministerial Level Conference that was held in Islamabad in 2015. The main target of this group is to promote Afghan peace via dialogue with the Taliban. All the participating members reiterated to facilitate Afghan led and an Afghan owned peace and reconciliation process. During the next meeting of QCG held in Islamabad in 2016 members from Taliban, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan participated that focused to resume peace talk with the Taliban which were stopped after the alleged death of Taliban leader Mullah Omer. This group carried extreme importance in essence because it was one of the first groups that brought China and US on the same page, where China could influence Pakistan and US had influence over Afghanistan. If China was to support common positions of the US and Afghan governments, it would be extremely difficult for Pakistan to resist that (*The Kabul Times*, 2016). However, the process of reconciliation was derailed after the death of Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansur by the American Drones in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. According to sources he was second in command of the Taliban after Mullah Omer who was considered a threat to the US and its allies.

SCO Response to the Islamic State (ISIS) in Afghanistan: Rhetoric and Reality

The attention of the global media was quickly captured by 2014 when the second most oil producing city of Iraq (Mosul) was captured by the Islamic State. The downfall of Mosul publicized that an equally dramatic conversion of Islamic extremism from Al-Qaeda to ISIS was consequently taking place since the attack on World Trade Center. From Afghanistan, China, India and Pakistan Muslim youth are ready to support and assist ISIS. What was worrisome about the entire situation was that the disgruntled factions within the Taliban groups and those against Mullah Mansur joined ISIS. The ISIS was growing fast in the region around Afghanistan and Pakistan (Jones, 2015). The rise of ISIS in Afghanistan appeared as a new threat to the war ravaged country which was already in the battlefield with the Taliban since 2001. Similarly, the ISIS had appealed to the rebel section of the Taliban for recruitment. The ISIS also rejected the Taliban rule in the country and both started fighting for gaining the power inside Afghanistan (Jones, 2015). For example in June 2015 the fighters of ISIS and Taliban were engaged in pitched battles in the Shinwar, Achin and other areas of Afghanistan. The US Army General John Campbell predicted that the numbers of ISIS militants in Afghanistan are from 1,000 to 3,000. He warned that "they have the ability to recruit quite well equipped fighter, not only in Afghanistan but also in the other parts of the world (Aman, 2016). In this regards the leader of Afghan Taliban had sent a formal letter to the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and warned him to stop recruiting in Afghanistan. He further stated in his letter "there is room for only "one flag, one leadership" in their struggle to re-establish Islamic State" (Ryan, 2015).

While talking to the SCO Summit that was held in Ufa, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin urged the member states of the SCO to back the Afghanistan government in its struggle TO eliminate terrorism. He further stated that the decade of international military presence in the Afghanistan 'did not bring changes for the betterment of security situation' that radical Islamists were spreading radicalization to CARs. He said, "there is a real threat of the trickling of instability into neighboring countries. The President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov said on that occasion, we the neighbours of Afghanistan cannot ignore this," He said the withdrawal of the NATO forces from Afghanistan will be disastrous to the proximate countries. The withdrawal of international forces will be created space, which can be easily filled by different militant organizations (*The News*, July 25, 2017).

SCO came into being after the successful Sino-Russian partnership from boundary formation to safeguard economic and strategic interest in Central Asia. Both considered the NATO and ISIS presence in their backyard a threat not only to their security but also to the development of Eurasian Silk Road. Afghanistan being an observer in the organization all other members were trying hard to seek peaceful solution to the Afghanistan problem through RATS (Baloch, 2016). According to the data collected by the RATS, ISIS was consistently growing its number of militants in Afghanistan especially in its eastern and northern parts. Vitaly Burov, the Deputy Director of the executive committee of RATS, said in this connection "that the RATS would provide support and would work with Afghan forces to counter the ISIS expansion in the region. The Afghan security forces would be furnished with practical support to counter the recruiting activities of militants. It will also enquire other channels for acquiring additional sources of funding (Sputnik, 2015). In this regard SCO already established a database of the terrorist group and the fighters who participated in various war areas like Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. It was working to prevent the terrorist infiltration to the regional countries (Boyko, 2016). The Executive Committee Director of RATS, Dzhenisbek Dzhumanbekov in an interview stated that the SCO was drafting the action plan against the global terrorism strategy in the CARs that will work under the auspicious of United Nations (*UN Information Service*, 2010). It has also initiated a proposal to work with ASEAN for the counter-terrorism strategy (Kurmat, 2011). The RATS

also assisted the security during the Beijing Olympics 2008, winter games in Astana and Almaty in 2011 (SCO website, 2009).

Process of Reconciliation with Taliban in Afghanistan: Chinese Views

The new government of Afghanistan headed by Ashraf Ghani was fully aware that they would have to grapple with a number of hurdles. They were conscious enough that Afghanistan being a war torn country had a need to face a number of challenges ranging from resetting the relations with neighbours to curb terrorism, extremism, poverty, corruption and the newly emerged ISIS. Unlike his predecessor Hamid Karzai, Ghani had adopted a different approach with respect to the foreign policy of Afghanistan. It was a U-turn in Afghanistan's foreign policy towards the west specifically US (Ober, 2015). Ghani stated that in order to arrange peace talks, the Taliban should agree to endorse the constitution of Afghanistan, freedom of speech and other fundamental rights should not be compromised. Even the US adopted the position to talk to the Taliban as they view them, as important partners for the future stability of Afghanistan (Rehman, 2016).

Afghanistan due to terrorism is severely affected country, is also a threat for China's Xinjiang province, as majority of Uighurs people are struggling for independent state (Huasheng, 2015). However a recent study suggests that China is shifting from passive involvement towards a more active stakeholder in Afghanistan. In Chinese reassessment security interest have been the most important. Most of the terrorists groups in Xinjiang were trained in the camps located in Pakistan while honing military skills through their involvement in Afghanistan. According to their views, the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, it would become a safe haven for anti-Chinese activities. It is clear from the facts that Uighurs separatism became a global Islamist concern which had noticed by the Chinese foreign policy makers. The ISIS has already established foothold in Afghanistan and they have already declared to liberate the Xinjiang from China's control (Khalilzad, 2014).

China kept on increasing investment in Afghanistan for example in 2008 it won the bid of the Aynak copper mines located in the eastern Afghanistan (Wines, 2009). Under this agreement Chinese government will also construct schools, colleges, clinics, markets and mosques. This is one of China's largest foreign direct investments in any other country. Similarly in 2011 it also secured oil and gas exploration rights in Sari Pul and Faryab provinces which are estimated as \$700 million. These projects would contribute to the Chinese economy as well as to the reconstruction of Afghanistan economy. It will also provide capital, technology and employment opportunity in Afghanistan (Huasheng, 2014). Investing in Afghanistan infrastructure; new transit corridors would also facilitate Chinese goods towards Iran, Middle East and towards the Gwadar port in Pakistan. On the other hands it will also give Pakistan's access to the Central Asian markets. On 18 July 2016 the four members of the Taliban delegation visited Beijing at the invitation of Chinese government. The main focus of the Taliban was to include China's leadership to raise the issue on international forum and to get help against the occupying forces [sic] of NATO and ISAF. Since the emergence of ISIS, China is in favour of playing a constructive role to bring peace and reconciliation to Afghanistan (Xinhua, 2015).

Similarly, the Taliban did not consider the Chinese as a threat like the US, because it has never used force against them. In retrospect, China considers the Taliban as a political faction that existed in Afghanistan in one way or the other. They are of the opinion that, to eliminate it militarily is unmanageable (Huasheng, 2014). He further said:

China long term plan [s] for Afghanistan and the Taliban are based on the consideration that China will have long-term connections with the Taliban. China did not oppose any organization but it will oppose terrorism, separatism, and extremism ((Huasheng, 2014, p.55).

Another important point in this regard is that Pakistan also supported the Chinese view of Afghanistan's reconciliation. There is optimism that China can influence Pakistan to bring about a shift in Pakistan's policy. In February 2012 Beijing initiated trilateral dialogue with Pakistan-Afghanistan and China. It also started trilateral dialogues on Afghanistan between China, Pakistan and Russia (*Global Times*, 2013) as well as Delhi, Moscow and Beijing (http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1124658.shtml).

On the other side of the equation Chinese investment in Afghanistan increased from 150 million dollars in 2012 to 200 million dollars in 2014. China the leading member of SCO, QCG and Heart of Asia Conference has a great stakes in Afghanistan stability. Protecting Chinese interests has been difficult if the security situation is volatile. For example the Aynak copper mines were attacked nineteen times by the Taliban and a result most of the Chinese engineers were deported back to the country (Downs, 2012).

The security of Afghanistan is directly proportional to the security of China and Pakistan. China, being a major investor can play an important role to connect the colliding parts. It has the desire and wish to fadeout misperceptions and controversies that is rooted in its history, geography and politics. In a nutshell, China's dream of stronger economic cooperation would materialize only if there is peace in Afghanistan which is very vital for regional economic activities (Khan, 2017 Personal interview).

The Chinese foreign policy of non-interference and strategic rivalries with other countries particularly the US is the main motivating force that helps to have friendly relations with the country. The Chinese economic overtures in Afghanistan will speed up economic development which can further improve the security situation. Focused should be laid down to eliminate drug trafficking that has intensified Taliban activities.

Conclusion

The raison d'être of SCO formation was to counter terrorism, extremism and separatism. Since the formation of Afghanistan Contact Group the organization's main focus was to control the security issues like terrorism and drugs production in the region that most of it emanated from Afghanistan. All the member countries of the organization have security and economic stakes in the country that is the main reason of their keen interest in the Afghan imbroglio. It is pertinent to mention here that the long term security and economic interest in Afghanistan will not be possible without the help of regional countries especially China and Russia.

Afghanistan is a lock to the regional problems and Pakistan is considered to be the un-lock of all these problems. The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan also need to be improved despite their historical clashes and Afghanistan irredentist claim on the territory of the Pakistan's side of Durand Line. Similarly the India-Pakistan blame game and Pakistan policy of strategic depth against India need to be revisited. Further, India's accusations at Pakistan on the issue of terrorism may not be fruitful as China would shield the later. Moreover, Russia is also reluctant to support India's concerns about Pakistan. In a retrospect, India perceives that the state sponsored terrorism is more perilous than the threats emanating from non-state actors. However, India wished that the role of non-state actors cannot be overlooked in the peace process with Pakistan. Such actors have hijacked

the peace process and hamper the security. Both countries can maximally get benefitted from its membership in the organization by consolidating relationship with CARs, which may not be available at any other forum. India has a greater say in setting up the SCO agenda. Pakistan perceptions vis-à-vis India's growing ties with CARs are apprehensive but SCO membership can also provide an opportunity to further its interest in CARs. Pakistan and CARs are also partners in SCO and ECO. Pakistan can facilitate by providing trade routes to the landlocked Central Asian Republics at the Gwadar Port which will be more valuable and convenient for CARs.

With the Central Asian states particularly Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Afghanistan has ethnic linkages where both countries can play vital role in the peace and stability of the country. Tajikistan can provide electricity to Afghanistan which is already involved in enterprises to deliver electricity to Afghanistan. All the members of SCO can support trans-regional developmental programs. CARs have abundance of natural resources that can be transported to other regional countries through Afghanistan, China, Iran, India and Pakistan. The CPEC can provide land routes to many of the above mentioned countries. There is no other organization except SCO that could provide political, economic and security cooperation.

The long stay of the US, NATO and ISAF forces could not bring possible results as the country is still suffering from terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking. Similarly, the London conference has also called for regional countries to come forward to settle the Afghan quagmire. All the regional countries like CARs, China, Russia, India, Iran and Pakistan have a larger stakes in the region for which stability of Afghanistan is very essential. SCO can provide a better platform for all to utilize their services for the better and peaceful Afghanistan.

In 2012 Afghanistan has been given observer status in the organization. After the inclusion of India and Pakistan, it is time to give Afghanistan a permanent membership in the organization as it belongs geographically to the SCO region. Afghanistan has also expressed its desire to become a full member during the last summit that was held in Russia in 2017. It has already submitted the application to seek permanent membership. In case of SCO cooperation with Afghanistan, it can use all its underground resources for reaching self-sufficiency and the organization can invest in the country, so its permanent membership in the organization would help the war suffered nation reach tranquility. To avoid negative impact, the member countries of SCO should be focused on the three evils as well as drug trafficking. Besides all these, the member states of the organization should refrain to entangle itself in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. It should be allowed to function as a neutral country, to bring it to the main wave of globalization.

Most of the SCO members are cooperating on bilateral levels, if that is transformed into multilateral level under the auspicious of SCO, it can bring positive result. Moreover, the Russian and Chinese divergent economic interests under the SCO are also producing negative impacts on the weaker states of CARs. Both should work on multilateral level to support its ongoing developmental projects in Central Asia and the region. Similarly, they should initiate SCO Development Fund, as it was proposed by China. This fund can be used in multilateral programme that has been initiated by SCO in the region.

Last but not the least; terrorism has emerged as a continuing challenge to the individual as well as state liberty to the majority of SCO members. The lack of coordination among South Asian and Central Asian states, this problem has become uncontrollable. Some measures have been taken

under different multilateral organization like ECO, SARRC and even SCO. However, a lot more need to be done to move from the recognition of terror as a common threat towards tangible collaboration among all countries to control this menace. There is an immediate need for workable cooperative security structure which could enable regional cooperation on a growing security issues.

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