

China's Involvement in Afghanistan Since 2014: Opportunities and Challenges

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Afghanistan is facing terrorism and serious law and order situation, which is a severe concern to China. Beijing has strategic, economic, and political interests in this neighbouring country. China, the emerging power, and peacefully rising state needs peace and stability in its neighbourhood. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is required for China's rise and fulfilling the "Chinese Dream". The U.S withdrawal has created both opportunities and challenges for China. This study mainly focuses on the question "why China has enlarged its level of involvement in Afghanistan since 2014? what are the opportunities China has and the challenges China has been faced?" Since 2014 China is following four points approach in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan. First, working to bring peace; second, develop its economy; third, strengthen governance and fourth, acquire international support. It has also emerged as the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan. China is struggling on humanitarian base and contributing to the rebuilding of the conflict-ridden state. This study is an attempt to know about China's involvement in Afghanistan since 2014 and highlights the opportunities both the countries have and strive to know about the challenges faced .

Keywords: China, Afghanistan, U.S. withdrawal, terrorism.

Afghanistan is China's immediate neighbour shares 76km border. Both countries are enjoying good friendly relations based on mutual respect and understanding. A significant feature of their relationship is that China and Afghanistan have no political or ideological differences (Hsiung, 2009). They also never faced any political differences in past (Ng, 2010). As concerned the 9/11 event and the downfall of the Taliban regime, and restoration of legitimate govt. Beijing restored immediately her diplomatic ties with the new Afghanistan's government which were stopped when Taliban captured the Kabul (Kley, 2006). Since that time Afghanistan and China relationship improved. Political leaders of both the respective countries are regularly visiting each other states. The Ex-presidents of Afghanistan, Mr. Karzai and Mr. Ashraf Ghani's first official visits to Beijing showed the rising recognition of the significance of their bilateral relationship for each other. This is also a sign of Beijing's role in Afghan affairs in the current scenario (Bashardost, 2019). Although PRC is Afghanistan's neighbour, strategic partner, and a major external direct investor, Beijing is keeping a low-profile overall in Afghanistan compared to other regional players (Wishnick, 2014). As concerned China's policy in this regard, she considers that Afghanistan should not go again into the hand of the Taliban, which will destroy China's relations and her ongoing projects in Afghanistan like Ainak

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projects etc. China is following a four tiers policy in Afghanistan since 2014. First, protecting security and stability; second, improving its economic system; third, strengthening governance and respecting the right of Afghans to decide their future; and fourth, acquiring a soft image in the international community (Huasheng, 2012).

China's Involvement in Afghanistan in the Post-2014 Era

The foreign policy of Beijing is based on five principles, among which the most important are the peaceful coexistence and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other sovereign countries. Chinese foreign policy towards Afghanistan and her involvement in Afghanistan in the post-2014 era is also based on these principles of non-intervention in domestic affairs and respect for sovereignty. In the post-2014 era, the involvement of China in Afghanistan can be divided broadly into six aspects. First, assisting Afghanistan in building various major schemes to strengthen public welfare and advance the living standards of the citizens of Afghanistan. Second, encouraged different companies of China to invest in Afghanistan to improve the independent growth capability of Afghanistan. Third, providing training facilities to professionals of various departments of Afghanistan to assist the state institutions and strengthen governance. Fourth, assisting the "Afghan Own and Afghan Based" peace process among the stakeholders in Afghanistan to play a positive role in bringing peace in the country. Fifth, helping Kabul to strengthen her relations with neighbour's states in order to integrate Afghanistan into the regional integration and cooperation process. Six, provide financial aid to Kabul as it faces financial problems to shield it from collapse.

In the month of February 2014, Mr. Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of China, visited Afghanistan and during his meeting with his counterpart, ensured China backing for Kabul in achieving smooth and sound political, economic and security transitions. After that, in July 2014, China had appointed Sun Yuxi as her first special envoy to Afghanistan, an experienced diplomat in Afghan affairs (Iqbal, 2016).

The country is facing insecurity, which also endangered its neighbours, including China and international peace and security. China being a good neighbour of Afghanistan and a responsible global power is playing a perfect and critical role in Afghanistan's peace process as a moderator and negotiator, particularly in the post-2014 era. Beijing needed to enlarge its involvement in the post-withdrawal era. China has numerous advantages that other mediating powers are lacking, making her a good player to break the deadlock in Afghanistan's conflicts and playing the role of "honest broker". China has never interfered in any conflict there nor sided with any faction, thus have no adverse memories. China has a comparatively positive image in Afghanistan. The role of China has been appreciated by all stakeholders and even by many worthy international organizations. China has also convinced Pakistan to help the peace process.

In the post- 2014 era People's Republic of China is providing aid to Afghanistan on humanitarian-basis and also taking an active part in the rebuilding of this war effected, war-torn and fragile country. On October 28, 2014, China and Afghanistan issued a joint statement that the two countries would continue to deepen the Sino-Afghan strategic and cooperative relationship and fortify their collaboration in the economic, political, cultural and defence fields, and cooperation in regional and global affairs in this new period

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(Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In 2014, The Chinese government had provided Afghanistan an aid of 81.7 million dollars and another package of 245 million dollars in the following three years. In addition, China trained 3,000 specialists and experts in mining, medicine, agriculture, education, and other fields for Afghanistan and provided 500 Chinese government scholarships to Afghani students. On the other hand, from 2001 to 2013, the total aid from China to Afghanistan was about 326.7 million dollars, so this expansion of aid was a major adjustment in policy (Yongbiao, 2018). Moreover, China has provided professional training to 800 different officials of Afghanistan and also offered and still offering comprehensive technical trainings to local Afghani People in various sectors. China also trained 300 officials of Afghanistan's police and provided 480 million-yuan aid to the Afghan security forces (Bashardost, 2019). Moreover, during newly elected Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's visit to China on 31st October 2014, China Premier Li Keqiang pledged an additional US\$244 million in aid in the next three years, as well as offered training programs and scholarships for students (Ludwig, 2015). Moreover, China has also built a teaching building, auditorium and a hostel at Kabul University, the national vocational training center, highway from Kunduz to Jalalabad, repaired the highway from Kabul to Jallalabad and Samangan to Bamiyan and custom office on Torkham. China also provided 309 million dollars to the housing scheme composed of the building of 10,000 apartments in city of Kabul, for the families of the army and police officials who are killed in service while the remaining would be given to the other government officers (Iqbal, 2016). In November 2015 during his visit to Afghanistan the voice president of People's Republic of China offered 1,500 more scholarships to Afghani students to get higher education (Panda, 2014). In the year 2017, People's Republic of China provided 90 million dollars to different developmental projects of the Badakhshan province alone. Apart from these the CTE and Huawei companies are also working on the development of optical fiber national grid. Kabul is also one of the beneficiaries of China's opening policy. As friendly neighbours, China and Afghanistan are increasing policy coordination, trade, connectivity and economic integration. According to the Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, a new military base is constructed in the province of Badakhshan by the China economic aid. In addition to this China has also funded a mountain brigade situated in this Badakhshan near the border (Ramachandran, 2018).

China sees Afghanistan as an important trading partner. China-Afghanistan bilateral trade is enhancing every year (Table 1). China has made special contributions to economic and trade development of Afghanistan, for example about 300 kinds of agricultural products exempted from tariffs. At present, China is an important trade partner of Afghanistan, the second-largest investor in Afghanistan, the second-largest importer, and the fifth-largest export market.

Table 1

China–Afghanistan Export and Import Statistics (US Dollar 10 thousand)

Year	Bilateral trade volume
2013	33785
2014	41093
2015	37359

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2016	44000
2017	48750
2018	54463

Source: China National Bureau of Statistics

The China-Afghanistan bilateral trade volume has got increased in the post-2014 era and both countries continue to display a tendency toward more trade and economic exchanges. China imports are increasing from Afghanistan since the China-Afghanistan financial relations have increased and gotten stronger in recent years. The Sino-Afghan Air Corridor was also opened in the month of November 2018 to strengthen trade between the two states. Kabul is looking for to export pine nuts, which demand has increased many folds in the market of China after opening this air corridor. It is estimated that this air corridor will empower Kabul to export 23,000 tons of pine nuts annually to the market of China, while expensive stones and saffron are also exported to China through this new trade corridor. China is one of the most important trade partners of Afghanistan. Their bilateral trade volume reached to 544 million dollars in 2018 (Zia, 2019). China has exempted Kabul from tax imports on 278 items and has deepened its economic relationship (Bashardost, 2019).

China's Post-2014 Interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has exceptional and huge importance in the geostrategic calculus of People's the Republic of China. The geopolitics of China neighbourhood has four obvious peculiarities, i.e., strategic, political, economic and geographical. In the quickly changing international security milieu, these aspects demand a more profound collaboration not only between Beijing and Kabul but also seriously need regional integration and close cooperation of all regional states excited for regional stability, peace and harmony built on mutual respect and esteem. In the post-2014 U.S scenario, productive engagement with Kabul is assisting the Beijing strategic, political, financial interests as well as will guarantee Chinese internal security safeties. Afghanistan is providing China the shortest transportation route for getting benefits from the mineral and energy resources of Afghanistan as well as the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and its Caucus. While Kabul is also looking towards the People's Republic of China for a key role in the economic development as well as in the restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan. On the other hand, China also looks to be approaching for playing a constructive role in contemporary Afghanistan.

Both the countries are looking forward to political stability because it is pre-requisite for their interests. It is a mutual interest about which both the countries share the same sentiment of understanding. China needs political stability in Afghanistan mainly for its own security, protection of her huge investment in the country, and also for the security and smooth progress of her investments in South and Central Asian countries as well as for the BRI project. If there would no stability in Afghanistan, it would not negatively affect Chinese interests in the country only but in the whole region. On the other hand, Afghanistan is in urgent needs of political stability because it is of critical importance for both peace and its economic development in the country.

China has three main interests and concerns in Afghanistan, two of which would require a long-term U.S. and NATO presence. First, ensuring the stability of Xinjiang by

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preventing the spread of extremism, separatism and terrorism from Afghanistan; second, developing economic and trade links, including obtaining projects of natural resources exploration; and third, limiting the growing influence of India and the United States (Ludwig, 2015), in Afghanistan as well as in the whole region. The presence of the United States, either alone or along with NATO and ISAF-Afghanistan helps to keep the first problem at bay and establishes enough stability to allow China to pursue the second. Only the third interest could be done if the United States withdraw. Davood Moradiyan of Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies Kabul says that Beijing does not want Taliban authority in Afghanistan and is also worried about the vacuum that would be created in the post U.S withdrawal era which the Taliban might fill, while China also does not want the stay of the United States forces in its immediate neighbourhood (Khan, 2015). It is clear, China is not going to jump into Afghanistan after U.S withdrawal, but however, it is likely that China has increased its involvement in Afghanistan. China wishes that Afghanistan may not be used against her. She has also economic interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, interested in the stability of Afghanistan.

Western Withdrawal Plan and China's Policy Adjustment

After Barak Obama election as the U.S. president in 2009 he initiated to bring some changes in his Afghan policy and on June 22, 2011, he had announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by December 2014. This announcement compelled China as well as other regional countries to revisit their foreign policies towards Afghanistan. The United States set up a schedule to hand over the charge of security to Afghan National Army by 2014, and the process is still underway to decrease the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Before this on June 18, 2013, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) handed-over the security to Afghanistan's National Army and the ISAF Forces also officially handed-over the control of 95 districts to Afghan security forces. The United States had a plan of keeping 13,000 troops for the maintenance of security and training of Afghan forces which will be available on the call of the Afghanistan army till 2024. Since 2001 the United States lost the lives of more than 2300 of its soldiers, 19,000 injured and spent 650 billion dollars in Afghan war (Afridi and Afridi, 2015), but still peace is a dream. Mainly due to its geo-political and strategic location and power politics of big powers in the region, Afghanistan has been subjected since long to foreign attacks, and proxy wars quite often. Infact it is the Afghanistan's geo-political and geo-strategic location which attracted big powers from Alexander to USSR and now the United States.

The US withdrawal is leading to change the whole landscape of the Afghanistan issue and its impacts on regional peace, security and stability as well as relations of Afghanistan with neighbouring countries including China. The US and NATO withdrawal created clashes among different ethnic and political groups trying for maximizing their power and share in Kabul which led to serious political instability. Therefore, every regional state including China gave special place in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan after the announcement of withdrawal. The withdrawal is creating both vacuum as well as security dilemma which matter a lot for China. The American military presence in Afghanistan is the part of a broader strategy to contain China. China wants that U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan but does not want to withdraw without restoring peace and stability because in such a situation it will become a direct threat to

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neighbouring countries. As concerned Chinese involvement in Afghanistan in the post-2014 era on October 28, 2014, President Xi Jinping during his meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani at the Great Hall he emphasized that Afghanistan is now undergoing the triple-transition in politics, security and economy, and China supports Afghanistan in safeguarding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the reconciliation process featured "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned". In accordance with policy On October 31, 2014, China hosted the 4th Foreign Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan which was the first international conference on Afghanistan after the establishment of the new Afghan government. Ministers and senior representatives of all member states and supporters of the Istanbul Process, including 14 member states in the region, sixteen extra regional countries, 12 regional and international organizations and four guests from the host state, attended this conference (Yongbiao, 2018). It was the first time that China hosted a major international conference on Afghanistan, which was sign of China's more active participation in Afghan affairs. Since 2014, China has become actively involved in Afghan affairs. In Afghanistan, China is continuously improving her soft image which is showing that China's interests are different from the interests of U.S. and other Western countries. US and her allies in Afghanistan planned to eradicate Taliban and install such a government in Kabul who would serve their interests in better way. While on the other hand, China is struggling on humanitarian bases and contributing positively to the rebuilding of war affected state. In fact, there are several horizons where the interests of both China and Afghanistan are similar and where they could find many new supportive prospects and opportunities (Ziegler, 2006). In the post 2014 period Beijing upholds a good aid set in Afghanistan and cooperating in copper mining, oil and gas exploration and communications development. China is mostly involved economically. Her investments in Afghanistan increased many folds and became the largest investor in Afghanistan. Such role playing by China in Afghanistan is fundamental for restoring peace and security in the state as poverty and lack of economic opportunities lead to conflicts and anarchy, and this is the core reason of terrorism in Afghanistan as terrorist organizations can easily get manpower for themselves.

China desires a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and wants to develop durable partnership with Kabul. The United States is claiming that China is getting benefits in Afghanistan at the expense of the United States and her allies and calls China a free rider. But China has a wider viewpoint because whoever get victory there will essentially need of foreign investments, peace process, stability, institutions building, capacity building and economic development for the durable solution of Afghan issue and China is contributing to all these fields since 2014 positively. Chinese help and support in the above-mentioned areas along with prospects for peace and political stability in Afghanistan also has direct prospects for people of Afghanistan because they are suffered a lot from war and instability. This is providing leverage to China in Afghanistan over the United States and other Western powers.

Opportunities

China's involvement in the post-2014 era in Afghanistan has created many opportunities for both the states. China's fundamental policy emphasizes is building a good partnership with neighbouring countries, focusing on creating an amicable, secure,

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and prosperous neighbourhood and featuring amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness. Being neighbours China and Afghanistan relationship become increasingly very significant for each other particularly in the post-2014 era. The U.S. withdrawal has created many opportunities. At present China is playing an important role in economic development of Afghanistan which is pre-requisite for peace, stability and prosperity in a war turned country as continuous war since many decades deteriorated the whole country. Currently several Chinese firms are engaged in different developments projects in this country. The Chinese huge economic investment is a key aspect in restoring peace, prosperity, and stability. It is evident that economic development and prosperity of people directly affecting peace, security and political stability in war affected countries like Afghanistan. Beijing has many economic interests and China has leverage over other stake holder players due to its soft image in Afghanistan as well as five principles of peaceful coexistence. Chinese approach is different from U.S. and her allies. U.S. and her allies say that peace can bring economic development and prosperity in Afghanistan while China has of the opinion that economic development can probably bring peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan. For any emerging power like China creation of soft image is very important especially in the neighbourhood. It helps to build smooth, good, and mutually beneficial relations with other countries. China is a soft power not like the United States. Beijing believes on peaceful coexistence, non-interference in the internal affairs of neighbours and mutually beneficial cooperation which are helpful in soft image creation of China. Mostly in Afghanistan she is engaged in developmental projects, investments in natural resources, capacity building programs, peace process and above all avoided to alignment with any specific fiction or group. Through this way and means China has built her soft image in Afghanistan.

China has also included Afghanistan in Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in March 2017, which was established in 2013 by Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping. It has more than sixty member countries. Afghanistan's membership in this bank opened a new phase for rapid economic development.

In the post-2014 era China and Afghanistan have established dynamically good relationship. China's support is necessary not only to make Afghanistan and stable country but also to decrease its dependence on US and West. An important aspect of China involvement in Afghanistan is that she had never any ideological or political conflicts with Afghanistan, which provide her a unique and special privilege, not available to those states which are fighting to bring stability, peace, and democracy for their vested interests in Afghanistan. China is rare among the other players as she is not and was never close to any group of the conflict and power struggle. All concerned parties in Afghanistan are pleased to see China expanded involvement and role in the country. Beijing has balanced relations with almost all political groups as Beijing never supported or favoured any specific faction or group against the other; a policy towards Afghanistan that must be learnt by other from People's Republic of China. The post withdrawal era is a best time for both Afghanistan and China to open a new chapter in their mutual relationship. The troops of the United States and other allies are quickly withdrawing from the Afghanistan and leaving behind an extensive vacuum in the country. These developments inside Afghanistan are making sense for China to step-up

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adeepen working partnership with Kabul (Panda, 2014).

With the deepening of China's understanding of the Afghanistan issue and the enhancement of China's interests there, she is more actively involved in Afghan affairs. This thing is also proved by the statistics of academic publications in China. According to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database, the number of Chinese academic papers, newspaper articles, and academic dissertations on Afghanistan increased between 1998 and 2016 (Table 2). This reflects the increasing China's concern and understanding of the issue of Afghanistan. The year-wise increasing number of publications in China regarding Afghanistan is showing her increasing interests and concerns. It shows the increasing importance and concern of Afghan affairs in China.

Table 2

Papers/Articles on Afghanistan in China by Year, 1998-2016.

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of Articles	79	62	65	478	972	462	323	312	375	467	494	655	781	664	650	651	658	953	820

Source: Zhu Yongbiao. China's Afghanistan Policy since 9/11 Stages and Prospects. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 58, No. 2, (2018), p. 295.

Prospects of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Afghanistan

U.S. geological survey shows that Afghanistan is blessed with different natural resources of total one trillion dollars which are including 1.6 billion barrels oil and sixteen trillion cubic feet gas and 240 million tons Copper (Ross, Trombly & Barr, 2014). Apart from these Afghanistan is lucky to have largest unexplored reserves of iron, marble, coal, metals, precious, gemstones lithium, cobalt, mercury, gold, lithium, thorium, chromite, potash, graphite, sulfur, asbestos, shingle and above all hydrocarbons found in about 20 areas, some of them are explored while larger number of them are still unexplored, due to terrorism, law and order situation and the unending conflict. When the sites of these natural resources opened for international investors in 2007 then People's Republic of China showed her keen interest in the exploration of these reservoirs. The biggest opportunity in the post-2014 era both for China and Afghanistan is the role of China in the economic development of Afghanistan as economic development is key for bring peace and durable stability in Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs foreign investment in exploration of these resources and in many other areas. At present China is investing in Afghanistan in projects related to mining, exploration of natural resources and infrastructure development. So far, China has invested 4.4 billion dollars through its many firms mainly Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCCL). Estimates of its Iron reservoirs are 421 billion dollars (Khan, 2015). Furthermore, in the North of the country the hydrocarbon rich Amu Darya basin is situated. The Aynak field, discovered in 1974 and surveyed by Soviet Union geologists in 1979, but not ever excavated. It is estimated that it holds 88 billion dollars copper reservoirs and estimated to contribute minimum 250 million dollars and may be more in taxes paid to Afghanistan by China depending on the market price of copper (Ludwig,

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2015). Since 2007 when Afghanistan's government opened its reservoirs for foreign investors China is taking active part in investment. According to Daily Outlook Afghanistan, People's Republic of China is the largest investor in Afghanistan (Daiyar, 2009). In this regard the most important Chinese projects are the Aynak copper field and Amu Daria oil and gas projects. At present, China is working on Aynak Copper project worth of 3.5 billion dollars through its Metallurgical Corporation Company for the period of 30 years which is the biggest FDI throughout the Afghanistan's history. Its income to Afghanistan is expected to be 45% of country's total budget (Bukhari, 2012). Infrastructure projects, such as power plants and railway tracts construction are also included. It is estimated that it will produce revenue more than all other projects of Afghanistan (Torjesen, 2010). Statistics show that this site has reservoirs of approximately \$88 billion. The total volume of this project is 20 percent of all FDI Afghanistan since 2001 (Bukhari, 2012). This project is generating 4000 direct jobs for Afghani citizens and will produce about eleven million tons copper in the next twenty-five years. The MCC also signed another agreement regarding Aynak project to build rail track from the North of Pakistan via Aynak and Kabul to South of Uzbekistan (Wines, 2009). Another important point in this regard is that the success of this project will increase more the Foreign Direct Investment of Afghanistan. Chinese corporations will find a leverage in comparison with other corporations. Along with this project a 400 Mega Watt power plant is also constructing by China as well as water exploration and water purification plant for the people of the area. The MCC company is also constructing roads, schools and mosques in region.

The project to explore three oil fields in Amu Darrya River Basin is also pursuing by China National Petroleum Corporation which is for a period of twenty-five years. Its contract was signed in December 2011. It is the first oil producing project in Afghanistan. Its survey estimated that these oil fields contain reservoirs of about eighty-seven million barrels. CNPC is investing 400 million dollars in exploring oil in Amu Dara River Basin and the estimates show that this project is going to generate 7 billion dollars revenue for the war effected and fragile Afghanistan. It is decided in the agreement that China will pay Afghan government 20 percent tax on revenue, 15% royalty and 70% of revenue on income. It is estimated that annually 304.35 million dollars will give this project to government of Afghanistan and total 7 billion dollars in the whole 25 years period of the contract (Tahiri, 2017). Apart from this the Alluvial iron reservoirs are also abundant, and the Haji Gaak and nearby mines are estimated to contain about 2,260 million metric tons steel with marks advanced than 62 heaviness out of a hundred iron (Tahiri, 2017). This is another very good opportunity for China to invest as well as also for Afghanistan because it will generate huge amount of revenue for economically very weak Afghanistan.

The Foreign Direct Investment and exploration of natural resources is offering another platform to China to increase its involvement in Afghanistan in post-2014 era. Moreover, by providing jobs to Afghani people in these mines and oil exploration projects, China is helping the Afghan government in bringing peace in the country because jobless mob is more luckily to join terrorist organizations. By developing natural resources in the country further expand her economic relations with Kabul and to some

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extent can fulfil the growing demand of her fast-rising industrial sector. Along with this, these resources exploration including oil, gas and copper etc. is going to provide huge amount of revenue to the government of Afghanistan and it is playing very positive role in improving the condition of its war affected and fragile society. The economic support and assistance of China is not required only to boost up already exhausted economy of Afghanistan but also necessary to decrease it depend on U.S. and Western aid. Afghanistan is a very weak and underdeveloped state with life-threatening poverty, joblessness and poor infrastructure. Currently, about 90 % of its annual budget is founded by foreign aid, where these Chinese projects are blessing for Afghanistan. Since the establishment of political government in Kabul after 9/11, China appeared as a key player in the rebuilding of war turned society.

China is working for supporting the exhausted economy of Afghanistan. Her struggles in Afghanistan are improving the living standard of its citizens and trying to end the extended war. She is also financing profusely the infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. This large-scale economic investment of China is a key aspect in restoring peace, prosperity and stability in Afghanistan. Chinese helps in improving the economy of Afghanistan is playing a significant function in reducing the opportunities and motivations of extremist and terrorist movements. Given the fact that fundamentalism can be reduced using the economic program, this is predictable, because a large part of the ominous movements in Afghanistan are due to the lack of job opportunities and economic insufficiencies. Afghanistan is the country that has the highest unemployment among youth. Andrew Small, a United States based Chinese expert, says “China is the only player who can foot the level of investment needed in Afghanistan to make it succeed and stick it out”. Afghan officials as well as its common People also duly acknowledge Chinese help and support. In a meeting with Yang Jiechi the Foreign Minister of China, Hamid Karzai the then president of Afghanistan said that Afghanistan highly appreciates and is proudful of being friend of China. He also paid cordial thanks to China for her help, assistance, and support in bringing peace and aid for rebuilding (Bukhari, 2012). In the upcoming years, the two-sided collaboration would rise and would make favourable environment for cooperation in different areas of mutual interests. These ties would be helpful in elimination of terrorism. Beijing is playing a dynamic role for restoring stability and peace not only in Afghanistan but in the whole region.

China considers that terrorism has socio-economic causes. To eradicate terrorism, it is necessary to remove its socio-economic causes. Joblessness, lack of economic opportunities and poverty are some of the main causes of terrorism in Afghanistan. It is evident that many people are joining terrorist and militant organizations due to joblessness and economic burden of their family. China is one of the big foreign investors in Afghanistan which is creating thousands of jobs and other economic opportunities. Her investments are considered very important for political and economic stability in the country. It is a key aspect in restoring peace, prosperity and stability. The investments in Aynak Copper project and Amu Darya oil fields creating thousands of jobs for local people. It is sure that jobs creation and economic opportunities are helpful in political stability and elimination of militancy and terrorism in different parts of the world. The study of Bhatia and Ghanem (2017) says that lack of enough job opportunities is fuelling extremism and terrorism. The report issued by Combating Terrorism Center in

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2016 about 4,600 Daesh foreign fighters in Middle East and North Africa also shows that majority of them were failed to secure jobs. People without job have the highest probability to become extremist. Likewise, Taspinar (2009) study also says that economic development is an important counter-terrorism narrative. Adelaja and George (2020) used panel data of different countries and their results show positive correlation between joblessness and terrorism. Moreover, Keita (2015) study argued that unemployment is directly linked with terrorism in African country Mali. Izzi (2020) studied different causes of terrorism in Africa. This study argues that among other the lack of employments for youth making them vulnerable to terrorist organizations which are offering them money and provision of employment opportunities protecting them from joining terrorist organizations.

Jobs Opportunities Created by Chinese Projects

There is a wide range unemployment throughout the country and even among the employed about 80 % is insecure. Nearly 3 quarters of the total population is under the age of 30 years. This huge youth population of around 8 million is entering the labour market with no or very low education while there is very few employment opportunities. The poor security environment due to continuous war creation of job opportunities and are incapable to keep-up with population growth rate. As China is the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan therefore a lot of jobs are created by Chinese projects for local People. Only the Aynak project is going to generate 4,000 direct jobs and the World Bank estimated that it could create further 7,600 indirect and 62,500 induced jobs (Iqbal, 2016). Likewise, 7,000 jobs are creating by the Amu Daria oil and gas projects for local People and many more indirect jobs. This is a very good sign for war-turned Afghanistan and especially eradication of terrorism from the country. As Afghanistan is facing highest unemployment therefore youth is easily available for the recruitment of terrorist organization. In its projects China is mainly employing local citizens and indirectly through this employment, she is providing for improving the structure of war-turned state. It is because that People's Republic of China desires to prevent local people from going to involve in any type of illegal activities.

Wakhan Corridor as the New Eurasian Land Bridge

Wakhan Corridor lies near to the Chinese city of Kashger. According to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the People's Republic of China, that Government of Afghanistan has requested Beijing to open this Wakhan corridor. If opened, then surely the citizens of Afghanistan will get a lot of benefit from this route. Therefore, it is proposed to Chinese government to construct a road, and even a railway track through this way to connect Afghanistan with China. In October 2014 Afghan President Mr. Ashraf Ghani during his official visit to China also proposed to his counterpart President Mr. Xi Jinping that we should work to construct a transportation link through Wakhan Corridor (Panda, 2014).



Figure 1: Map Showing Wahan Corridor.

Lapis Lazuli Corridor

Another very good opportunity is the Lapis Lazuli Corridor. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated this corridor in the Herat province of Afghanistan in December 2017 to boost up trade in the whole region. The Agreement of Lapis Lazuli corridor was signed on the sideline of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII) in November 2017, aimed of increase trade, strengthen economic relations and connectivity in this region. Afghanistan is a gateway to Europe and Caucasus and the Lapis Lazuli route links Afghanistan to Europe via Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and serves as a good rout for international trade among states of Central Asia, South Asia and Europe. It is very significant Corridor for China also who is the largest exporter to the connecting countries by this corridor. It is leading for realizing wide-range growth through transit trade (Zia, 2019).

OBOR Initiative and Afghanistan

In the present international system, it looks that the epicenter of global economy is changing to Asia from West due to the rise of China. Thus, the rise of China become the main concern for Western countries particularly the United States. Since the launching of One Belt, One Road Initiative, Afghanistan has repeatedly expressed interest in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is reasonable. Afghanistan needs massive investment to promote economic growth, and its unique strategic location provides the possibility for it to play a bigger role in the Silk Road Economic Belt. In this regard, Afghanistan can provide China one of shortest and easiest passage road to Central Asian and European markets and can better facilitate the BRI project which is win-win opportunity. Moreover, China needs markets for its exports while also require energy imports. Here, Afghanistan is a good market for both commodity consumption and China's energy security, because in Afghanistan there are a lot of energy resources. On the other hand, Afghanistan importing a large amount of its consumer goods from China through passing the second or third country. If Afghanistan gains the One Belt One Road project, this will be most important for communication and economic development. The main characteristic of this project is the regional integration.

Peace Process

Being the permanent members of the UN Security Council, China is taking responsibility very positively of international affairs. In a way, Afghanistan provides an opportunity for China to participate in international affairs. She is playing a very positive role in the peace process in Afghanistan and its active participation in the reconstruction

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and peace process is not only benefiting the people of Afghanistan, but also a very good opportunity to expand cooperation and even consensus with the US and other countries. Since 9/11, China and US relations have experienced a fundamental transition. Cooperation has become a key factor in bilateral relations. This thing also increased Chinese soft image in the hearts and minds of local Afghan people. They are acknowledging China positive role which is also beneficial for Chinese projects in Afghanistan as well as for overall relationship with Afghanistan. Her role is also appreciated both on local level as well as on international level. Actually, China has a wider viewpoint about the situation in Afghanistan because whoever get victory there will essentially need of foreign investments, peace process, stability, institutions building, capacity building and economic development for the durable solution of Afghan issue and China is contributing to all these fields since 2014 positively.

China-U.S. Cooperation on Afghan Issue

There are some disagreements regarding Afghanistan issue between China and US, but at the same time there are also common interests. Both countries want a stable Afghanistan, which is the most important point of consensus. China clearly showed its support to the United States. In a joint declaration with the United States president Barak Obama, the Prime Minister of China assured the Chinese support in Afghanistan, in order to counter extremism and terrorism and to ensure internal peace and security to advance sustainable economic, political and social development. China and the US have already started some cooperation on Afghanistan issue. For example, a few Afghan diplomats have been jointly trained by China and the US (Yongbiao, 2018). Also, Chinese investments in Afghanistan can be seen as valuable support for the US strategy in Afghanistan. After Ashraf Ghani's visit to China and China's declaration of \$ 326.7 million in aid to Afghanistan, a senior official of the State Department of the United States said that the Washington praises China and welcomes it to play a larger role in the issue of Afghanistan. In many areas, China and the United States have conflict of concepts and ideas but in several areas, both the countries are collaborating also in Afghanistan. China is playing a productive role in the war effected state because it is a responsible rising power. The United States wish a stable and peaceful Afghanistan, and a stable peaceful Afghanistan is also in China's interest. China's main aim of growing role in this neighbouring country is the restoration of peace because including other effects of terrorism in Afghanistan on China she is facing the threats of spreading extremism and terrorism from Afghanistan as both the states share common border.

Challenges to China's Involvement in Afghanistan

Along with opportunities China is also facing many underlying challenges in Afghanistan. These challenges are of diverse nature, not only security related. Afghanistan has continued to be a battlefield for outside powers for the accomplishment of their strategic interests and wasted objectives. Due to geo-strategic location coupled with polar nature of Afghan society where ethnic groups are fighting for gaining power with the help of foreign powers have ruined the state and society in Afghanistan, destroyed its institutions, infrastructure, trade and its routes disrupted and dried-up the stream of labours and wealth. During and in the post-Soviet Union occupation anarchy prevailed in the state and ultimately the 9/11 event has given the opportunity to US,

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NATO and ISAF for the intervention, and ultimately withdrawal in the post-2014. In this circumstance since 2014 China-Afghanistan relationship established well, but there are still many underlying problems and challenges primarily security which is creating problems for China to work smoothly. China is also facing many challenges in Afghanistan due to Western presence as well as terrorism. The main challenge in China and Afghanistan bilateral relations is the presence of US in Afghanistan which is the main competitor of China in regional as well as in global politics. The US forces in neighbouring Afghanistan is also a threat to China's interests in region as well as her security and stability. US is countering China from Afghanistan. Moreover, terrorism, militancy, law and order situation, low economic profile of Afghanistan, weak institutions and disability of Afghanistan are some leading issues which are affecting China and Afghanistan relations and Chinese presence in the post 2014 scenario.

Security Dilemma

Security condition in Afghanistan is very bad. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan recorded 3,812 civilian casualties in the first 6 months of this year, and about 1.1 million People are internally displaced due to war which clearly show the intensity of the situation in Afghanistan. Despite of 18 years continuous US led war on terror in Afghanistan the security situation is still very bad. This has also created many challenges to China's involvement, relations with Afghanistan as well as the national security of China. Deteriorated security situation in Afghanistan has negative impacts on China directly and indirectly. The future of Afghanistan is also unpredictable. Terrorism in Afghanistan has also impacted on China's western border region and any change in country have important effects on regional countries security. China's investments also face increased risks. In the post withdrawal era different situations will arise, but the most hostile and dangerous one is the continuation of terrorism and worst law and order situation throughout Afghanistan. This anarchic and radical situation will lead to destabilize the whole region. In this country there are long-lasting stakes of neighbouring, regional and extra regional players in a peaceful and stable state of Afghanistan. In the post 2014 era it is also feared that destabilized Afghanistan will leading to worsen the issues of drug production and trafficking, increasing extremism, terrorism, militancy and violence not only in Afghanistan but in the whole region. This condition has also overwhelming negative effects on China and her investments in the country as well as on other neighbouring countries. Afghanistan provides many opportunities to China including access to natural resources, cross border trade routes, investments opportunities, infrastructure building and the chance to increase her worth in international affairs. All these are imaginable when there is peace and stability in the country after the United States Withdrawal. In the post withdrawal scenario, China needs to walk very carefully and cautiously in assuming any key duty or responsibility in Afghanistan. Yet it has plans to stay a bit away from wreck of the conflict, war and security vacuum. A good option for China is SCO to play role in the post withdrawal period. SCO has given the observer membership status to Afghanistan which is showing that Shanghai Cooperation Organization is getting preparation to assume a notable task in the post U.S withdrawal Afghanistan. Beijing also focuses on its efforts against drug-trafficking as that is a key source of funding to militant groups and poses a threat to public health in the region. In the post withdrawal era, it is feared that the drugs production will increase which will also affect China.

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Worsening Security in Afghanistan Hamper Economic Cooperation

Maintaining security in Afghanistan is the biggest issue. The United Nations in its new report has claimed that the security situation in Afghanistan has recently been worsened, said that the conflicts between security forces and Taliban militants increasing day by day. It has recorded five-percent increase as compared to last year. The situation is getting worsened at a time that the security forces are facing a new terrorist front (the Daesh terrorist group) which has established bases in different mountainous regions in the country. In the post 2014 era international community including US are giving less attention to the security of Afghanistan, because their full attention is towards how to get safe way to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan. Afghan army and police are yet not capable to compete Taliban, Al-Qaeda as well as Daish. Paying attention to the empowerment and well training of the national army and police is not only the responsibility of the government, but it is also the work of international allies who have frequently promised to help the Afghan army. The US-led international coalition is well aware of the problems that Afghan army or police are facing but still they are paying less attention.

The in-depth study of Chinese policy shows that she is following the policy of harmonious world and this policy also aimed that China wants peace in whole world and particularly in her neighbourhood. She is doing economic cooperation with Afghanistan and is largest investing country in Afghanistan, but the security problems in Afghanistan put China in a difficult situation. The high frequency of terrorist activity in Afghanistan has frightened off Chinese companies and investments. On many occasions Chinese employees were attacked and kidnapped in Afghanistan in which many were killed and injured while pursuing the developmental projects and humanitarian activities. In the 11 years since the Aynak contract was signed in 2008, the project has made little progress, mainly due to the security problem. This project has been attacked 19 times so far and many China engineers and other workers faced direct threats, killed, injured and abductions. China National Petroleum Corporation working on Amu Daria oil and gas project, engineers and other employees also came under similar threats by insurgents.

Challenges in Peace Process

China is one of the main stake holders of peace process in Afghanistan. There are many underlying challenges she is facing being a facilitator of the peace process. The main challenge is the disagreement among militant groups itself. Likewise, the affiliation of terrorist organizations like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also making uncertainties about the future of peace-talks and possibilities of the political settlement between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban. China is working in a state of affairs where the jeopardies and risks attached with peace talks are very high, as only a group of Taliban participated in peace process and reached to an agreement while many other groups of Taliban as well as other militant groups are still not willing to come to the negotiation table. While keeping the troublesome ground reality in mind, the common Afghani people have high expectations from China. Muhammad Ismail Qasimyar who is adviser to the High Peace Council noted while expressed his hope that China could assist and help Afghanistan in winding up the ongoing fighting and war in the country by playing her worthy role in peace

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process. The High Peace Council considers China's hard work in the reconciliation process as both productive and result oriented (Alizai, 2015). Unfortunately, this is a fact that the reconciliation process in Afghanistan is a too much complicated matter which is very tough to handle by anyone even including China. Afghanistan is a multi-dimensional and multi-ethnic country with several strong stakeholders in its current battle and peace process. All the players and stakeholders have different interests and goals and employing diverse tactics and approaches which lead the peace process to not any realistic approach. China because of her neutral foreign policy towards Afghanistan has gained the focus of several hopeful eyes. Though China is determined to strictly limit to being a peace process facilitator, not as the party to the conflict. It is for Afghanistan to bargain efficaciously with the Taliban and other fighting groups.

The Power Vacuum in Afghanistan

A power vacuum has been created as a result of the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. This vacuum can also be filled by non-state actors mainly terrorists. If this issue is not managed after the withdrawal of US and its allies troops from Afghanistan, it will create an uncertain situation in Afghanistan as well as this will be a challenge for the security structure of the region. This issue will also surely pose challenges to China.

Power Struggle in Afghanistan in the Post-2014 Era

When foreign forces withdrew from Afghanistan, a new game for gaining power will begin amongst the great powers as well as regional players. This thing is not good for Chinese involvement in Afghanistan. It seems that in the near future the collaboration and close cooperation among big-powers and regional players is not evident. This condition is creating serious security challenges not only for the state of Afghanistan only but also for China, South Asia and Central Asia. On the other hand, peace and stability in Afghanistan have many positive impacts on the security of People's Republic of China and its interests in the whole region. Thus, peace and insecurity became the common interest and common threat for both the states.

To summarize the main argument, in the post-2014 era instability in Afghanistan is a serious concern for China. Therefore, China increased her involvement in Afghan affairs which has created many opportunities and at the same time many underlying challenges. The increased involvement improved the volume of bilateral trade, increased Chinese FDI in Afghanistan in infrastructure sector and exploration of natural resources, creating jobs and other economic opportunities for local people, increased aid, increased scholarship for Afghan students, inclusion of Afghanistan in BRI and CPEC, contribution to peace process and engagement with US. At the same time China is also facing many challenges in the post-2014 era. These challenges are worsening security situation, attacks on Chinese workers, ethnic and political challenges to the peace process, power struggle among different groups, ethnicities and regional players and the power vacuum created by US and NATO withdrawal.

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Conclusion

The US withdrawal plan has compelled China to rethink its Afghan policy. China involvement in Afghanistan become increasingly very significant for each other in the post-2014 era. The constructive engagement and relations of China with neighbouring countries including Afghanistan is based on Beijing's foreign policy principles of peaceful coexistence, good neighbouring policy, win-win strategy and mutual benefit. China wants Afghanistan peaceful, developed, well-managed and run by Afghans themselves, there should be a political solution of the ongoing Afghan issue, and all stakeholders must contribute to rebuilding Afghanistan. The U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan created both opportunities and Challenges for regional countries especially big powers like China. Therefore, in the post-2014 era, China is primary focusing on bringing peace and stability to protect Afghanistan from again becoming an anarchic state because it will definitely affect China economic, political and strategic interests. The US and her allies in Afghanistan plan to eradicate the Taliban and install such a government in Kabul that could serve their interests better. While China is working on humanitarian basis and contributing to the rebuilding of this war-affected country. Presently, some Chinese firms are involved in numerous construction and economic projects of national importance in different areas of Afghanistan and China is also emerged being the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan mainly in mineral and energy sectors, which has very positive impacts on bringing peace, stability and prosperity in the war turned Afghanistan. She is assisting Afghanistan in building diverse major schemes to strengthen public welfare and advance the living standard of the citizens of Afghanistan, encouraged different companies of China to do investment in Afghanistan in order to improve the growth capability of Afghanistan, providing training facilities to professionals of various department of Afghanistan in order to assist Afghanistan's institutions and improve governance, assisting "Afghan Own and Afghan Based" peace process, helping the government of Afghanistan to strengthen her relations with neighbours states and also provides economic aid to protect the government from collapse. These are the fundamentals for the solution of the Afghan issue. These types of help and assistance are more and more in line with the expectations of local inhabitants than the just deployment of troops. While working in Afghanistan Beijing is also sticks to the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states and un-conditional aid to weak countries. This policy and strategy of China determined a very good example for other big powers in this regard. Beijing is well-aware of all problems and realities and doing an effort with full enthusiasm to ensure regional peace and stability.

Recommendations

In the light of the detailed discussion on "China's Involvement in Afghanistan since 2014," the following recommendations are put forward for the improvement and making more beneficial the bilateral engagement, improve economic and security conditions of Afghanistan, eradicate terrorism, find a new market of about 38 million people to Chinese goods and regional integration.

Recommendations for China.

- ✓ In the post-withdrawal era Afghanistan needs to strengthen its institutions, economy, make strong security forces and economic aid to run the governmental operations.

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China should increase its help and assistance in the above-mentioned areas in order to make Afghanistan strong, stable and developed state.

- ✓ China should increase its aid, technical assistance, training facilities to Afghan officials, as now U.S. and NATO are giving less attention to these areas.
- ✓ One of the durable solutions of the Afghan issue in the post-withdrawal era is educating more and more the people of Afghanistan in order to make them capable to run Afghanistan. China should increase its role in educating people and increase scholarships for Afghan students.
- ✓ To improve bilateral trade, China may open the Wakhan Corridor.
- ✓ China should deepen its collaboration in the field of oil, gas and copper exploration as well as the development of other mineral resources.
- ✓ Afghanistan needs to be a full member of SCO. All other neighbours of Afghanistan are members of SCO and if she also gets full membership then it will be better for Afghanistan as well as beneficial for China's involvement in Afghanistan and for the relationship of both countries.

Recommendations for Afghanistan.

- ✓ It is necessary for Afghanistan to further improve its relations with regional countries because the regional countries can better help rather than extra-regional countries in the restoration of peace, stabilization of the country and resolution of its economic problem.
- ✓ Afghanistan should fully avail the opportunities created by the increased involvement of China in the country since 2014.
- ✓ Afghanistan should increase the security of Chinese workers in order to maintain Chinese investment and progress in natural resources and other projects.
- ✓ Afghanistan should utilize the good offices of China in negotiations for decreasing political and ethnic differences among different groups.

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