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The Study of Chinese Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan

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Abstract

Foreign Policy is the use of political influence in order to induce other states to exercise their law-making power in a manner desired by the states concerned: it is an interaction between forces originating outside the country's borders and those working within them. The policy pursued by People's Republic of China in order to achieve its national/ International interests by maintaining relations with other states at International level is regarded as Chinese Foreign policy. The diplomatic relationship between Afghanistan and China started in 1955 when the first diplomat of Afghanistan, Abdul Samad, was posted to Peking. Historically, the two neighboring countries were involved in trade relations with one another via Xin Jiang and Wakhan Corridor. This paper covers the role of China in the peace building and reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2001 as well as the foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan in the era of Xi Jinping and onwards, who became the President of China in 2013, as the complete paradigm shift of Chinese foreign policy in his era. In this paper, the foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan in different dimensions i.e.; trade, politics, defense etc. will be analyzed. The discussion will revolve around the contemporary socio-economic, political and strategic relations between these states.

Keywords: Afghanistan, China, Foreign Policy

Introduction

Foreign policy of a country describes the behavior of one country towards others countries in international system. Foreign policy documents the ways through the federal government of an independent country keep relationship with other counties according to the international system to accomplish numerous goals and objectives. Foreign policy is the key element in the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into concrete course of action to attain these objectives and preserve interests (Sutter, 2007).

Afghanistan and China, being neighboring states, maintain diplomatic relations with one another since 1955. After the invasion of Afghanistan by former Soviet Union 1979, the

relationships between Afghanistan and China faded and reached at their worst point. Their relations improved significantly in 21st century. China always maintained a supportive and neutral policy towards Afghanistan. It never interfered in the internal matters of Afghanistan.

In the last 2 to 3 years, particularly in Xi Jinping's presidency, we can see a major increase in the direct diplomacy and high level visits between the two states. In the last few days of Hamid Karzai in office and the first official visit to Beijing of newly elected President Ashraf Ghani are giving the indicators that the two countries are trying their best to be as friendly as possible towards each other. China can see some major interests in Afghanistan as Afghanistan has a lot of potential in terms of natural and human resources as well as a prime strategic position in the region, although China has always raised concerns over insurgency in Afghanistan which seems like never ending. China is an emerging economic and super power in International arena and its concerns over engaging itself in such a complex and controversial issue is legitimate but remaining completely unconcerned over this issue will cause a problem for regional security and stability which is very necessary for the growth of China these days. ¹

Objectives

The fundamental objective of this study is to identify;

- the foreign strategy of China for Afghanistan
- the role of China in reconstruction and development of Afghanistan

Methodology

The ultimate focus of the research will be to evaluate the China's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in different dimensions i.e. social, political, economic, defense etc. China's investment in Afghanistan will be discussed in the light of some statistical data. This research paper will discuss the various factors that can make Afghanistan, a strategic and economic partner of China. Therefore, the type of the research would be analytical, statistical and descriptive.

The type of data used for the research paper is secondary as different books, research articles were consulted. Organizational homepages were also consulted and it has been made sure that only authentic sources are being consulted as used by Ullah (2020).

Theoretical Framework

The foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan in the recent years can be seen through the lens of Liberalism. Kant, being the major proponent of Liberalism, emphasizes on the ways through which peace and cooperation could be achieved. Under the presidency of Xi Jinping, one can observe that China is investing in Afghanistan and is assuming the responsibility as a regional power in taking greater dynamic role in the long delayed peace process in Afghanistan although it has always stayed away from the regions and nations at war. ²

Afghan-China Relations – An Overview

Historical Relations- Before Year 659

¹ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/08/china-afghanistans-new-hope/>

² http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/world/asia/china-considers-larger-role-in-afghanistan-peace-process.html?_r=0

During the entire history of relationship between Afghanistan and China consisted upon mostly of tea and fruit trade through via caravans via Wakhan Corridor and Xinjing on their borders. Before year 659 Monks from Buddhist from the location (existing Afghanistan) were involved in the Silk Road transmission of Buddhism to Han dynasty, China. The Territory of Han dynasty of Western areas bordered the Kushan Kingdom (An, 2012).

Modern Relations- After 1955

The border between Afghanistan and China consists of 92.45 kilometers. The relations between Afghanistan and China diplomatically established on 20th January, 1955. when the first ambassador of Afghanistan, Abdul Samad was posted to China. In January 1957, Premier Zhou and Vice Premier He Long came to Afghanistan and met with Zahir Shah (king of Afghanistan), and Mohammad Daud Khan (Prime Minister) and other top leadership of Afghanistan. This was the first ever visit of Chinese leaders to Afghanistan, Sino-Afghan relationship. This visit raised the joint understandings between Afghanistan and China and grounded a concrete foundation for the boosting the friendly relationship between these countries (Daveed, 2014).

The Mohammad Daud Khan visited China in October 1957 by receiving an invitation from the Chinese government and held meetings with the top leadership of China regarding mutual understanding and friendly trade relationship (Derven, 2000). The mutual relations were developing with the passage of time. Afghanistan and China signed the boundary treaty in Beijing in November 22, 1963. This agreement eliminated the territorial dispute between Afghanistan and China over the Wakhan - Afghan controlled, the border between Xingiang Uyghur Automous- China and Badakhshan Province-Afghanistan.

But the relations were badly effected in December 27, 1979 when the troops of Soviet were deployed in Afghanistan and the government of China refused to recognize Soviet support Karmal government. During the separation of Sino-Soviet, strained the Afghan-China relations and resulted in gory border disputes and mutual backing for enemies. The during the rule of Kings, the relations between both the countries remained neutral. In 1978, after seizing the power by the pro-Soviet Afghanistan Communists positively harmonized the relations between neighbor countries again.

Post Relations - 2001

The relation between Afghanistan and China improved and established more in 2001 after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In 2001, China sent a team of Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Afghanistan for attending the interim administration foundation ceremony and congratulation message to newly selected President Hamid Karzai (James, 2013). The president of Afghanistan- Hamid Karzai, visited China in January 2002 and met his counterpart president Jiang Zemin and other high officials. The China donated one million USD cash and thirty million yuan of emergent material. Besides this, the government of China declared that it will provide valued USD150 million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Routledge, 2016). The Foreign Minister of China visited Afghanistan in May 2002 and met with president, chairman-interim administration and his counterpart. Both the countries signed a contract regarding technical and economic cooperation for provision of USD30 million aid to Afghanistan (Opacin, 2014).

The Afghan Foreign Minister visited China in November and exchanged with them for provision of USD one million of material aid to Afghanistan. China along with five other Afghan neighboring countries signed a declaration in Kabul endorsing its assurance to veneration the

sovereignty and regional integrity of Afghanistan to support its peace and reconstruction process. The president of Afghanistan- Hamid Karzai visited China in February 2003 twice and then the vice president of Afghanistan- Newmatullah Sharhrani visit China to talk with his counterpart Zeng Qinghong and other high authorities and signed an agreement of USD15 million for economic and technical cooperation (Joshu, 2018).

Three Dynamics of Foreign Policy of China's towards Afghanistan:

The foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan can be seen in three different dynamics:

- 1) Security, being the first and most important one.
- 2) Commercial and economic interests.
- 3) Public Diplomacy.

1. Security

Security, as mentioned earlier, is one of the most important factors for China to make its foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

1.1. Chinese Approach towards Afghanistan in Terms of Security Threats:

Reuters (2018) documented that National security and state survival are the most important factors for any country, so China's main interest in Afghanistan is its security. These two states are neighbors and share a border line of about 92.45 kilometers. Afghanistan is regarded as hub of extremists and terrorists while on Chinese side its Xin Jiang, a Chinese province, which is highly susceptible to separatist and extremist movements. China has concerns over the spread of extremism and separatism via Afghanistan to its north western territories of Xin Jiang because the radical factions in Afghanistan have sympathies for the Uighur Muslim minorities in Xin Jiang who are not allowed to practice their religion openly (Starriditor, 2012).

The situation in Xin Jiang is becoming highly complex and has become one of the major parts of national security strategy of China. A dualistic approach is required to solve this security threat. On one hand, it has to control and combat separatist and extremist movements in the region while on the other hand, it is trying to isolate external terrorism and terrorism reaching there via Afghanistan by sealing off the narrow Wakhan corridor and by not participating in internal affairs of Afghanistan.³

1.2. Chinese Efforts to Maintain Stability and Peace in Afghanistan:

In the recent years, we can see that Beijing has started establishing "security relations" with Kabul slowly and gradually since the election of Ashraf Ghani in 2014. The chief of army staff of China announced in February 2016 that roughly \$70 million donation to help the government of Afghanistan for their struggle against terrorism. At the beginning of July, the first lot of military equipment by Chinese Army was received by Afghan forces.

China is participating in multifaceted and regional struggles to approach Afghanistan's issues, extending from dealing with security and formal capabilities to improving border control, combating networks of criminal, and antiterrorism. One such case is of Heart of Asia process which started in 2011 and involves various states including China. The sole purpose of this is to provide Afghanistan with fewer problems around its surroundings and a better internal situation.

³ <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/19/afghanistan-chinas-new-frontier/>

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional alliance and organization aiming to promote peace, stability and cooperation on economy, politics, defense and security, of which China is an important part, has given Afghanistan a status of a member state in the start of 2016 (Stanzel, 2016). China has until now contributed in the development assistance, investment projects, and in its more recent and less typical contribution to peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. China increased its contributions to Afghanistan's development significantly in the last two to three years: it provided roughly \$240 million in development assistance and aid between 2001 and 2013, and around \$80 million in 2014 alone.⁴

2. Commercial and Economic Interests:

The second wave is commercial and economic interests of China in Afghanistan which can be seen shaping the foreign policy of China in recent years. Afghanistan's ironic inorganic resources propose opportunities for the public and private corporations of China to invest in it (Xiangyu, & Chunyan, 2012).

2.1. China's Approach towards Afghanistan in Trade, Economy and Investment:

Huasheng, 2015). Argued that although China is reluctant to make any huge investments in Afghanistan, but its changing attitude can be easily seen in the past few years particularly after the election of Ashraf Ghani as the prime minister of Afghanistan. One can easily observe the growing Chinese interest in Afghanistan not just because of its highly significant strategic position but also because of its human and mineral resources. According to a US report, there are untouched resources of about \$1 trillion in Afghanistan. Once China starts exploring and exploiting them, it can fully use their mineral wealth.

2.1.1. Two Important Investment Projects by China:

Coherent with the investment priorities of China, Chinese SOE's (State owned Enterprises) are working in the mining and energy sectors of Afghanistan. The two main investment projects by Chinese companies in Afghanistan are:

- The Project of Aynak copper mine in the Kabul's Southeast, (2008) in which two Chinese SOE's, MCC and Jiangxi Copper Cooperation (JCCL) are supposed to invest about \$3 billion and are jointly developing this mine.⁵
- The "China National Petroleum Company" which is developing the Amu Darya Oil Fields in Northern region of Afghanistan.

These three companies have planned to invest about \$5 billion in Afghanistan through China's Exim Bank and China Development Bank.

2.1.2. Infrastructural Developments and Penetration of Chinese companies in Domestic Market of Afghanistan:

China, in few recent years, has become more involved in infrastructure development across Afghanistan by constructing a network of railways. China Railway Construction Corporation is involved in these railway constructions and is most likely to expand this network across country in coming years.⁶

⁴ <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/09/05/chinas-interests-in-afghanistan/>

⁵ <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/09/05/chinas-interests-in-afghanistan/>

⁶ Chinese Foreign relations with weak peripheral states by Jefferey Reeves.

2.1.3. Economic Aids

In the past few years, the economic support of China for Afghanistan have boosted expressively. Between the time period 2001- 2013, China provided Afghanistan with an economic aid of about \$240 Million. But in the year 2014, this economic aid by China to Afghanistan was increased and it reached at \$80 million. And in the coming five years, it could increase even more.⁷

2.1.4. One Belt One Road Initiative

Under the inventiveness of One Belt One Road (OBOR), the revitalization of old silk routes, China can integrate Afghanistan in it and make Afghanistan improves its economy.⁸ China's Silk Road Economic Belt strategy comprises of the building of railways and roads to link the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Afghanistan is situated at the axle of geographic of these regions, and any strife there would most likely consequence in insecurity, making it difficult for the plan to succeed (Downs, 2012). If Afghanistan touches a particular level of security and affluence with a growing population, it might become a manufacturing and export destination for the producers of China hunting for new markets and economical labor. China also desires to utilize Afghanistan as a transit route for oil inventing in Iran.

2.2. Implications of Chinese Investment in Afghanistan:

The China is keenly interested in security in Afghanistan, but has followed diverse plans to attain security. The investment of China in Afghanistan could effect in the initiation of region either as a global economic player or as a continuously examined anxiety spot.⁹

3. Public Diplomacy

China requires a stable and peaceful Afghanistan towards which it can extend and advance its economic policies. China has never ever interfered in the internal domestic matters of Afghanistan but from the mid 2000's, we can see that China is trying to ensure stability in Afghanistan and is showing responsibility and commitment towards this cause (Xiangyu, 2011).

China wants and aims to extend its soft power i.e. negotiations, dialogues, mediation etc. in a country which is suffering from war conditions and civil unrest. It wants to use soft power instead of hard power in case of Afghanistan. They have always opted for dialogue and cooperation in their policy towards Afghanistan. China has always tried to keep its hands off any controversial issues because it does not want to be professed as outfitting to Western interests. It never participated in War on Terror by sending its troops in Afghanistan with ISAF forces of UN.

Tanner, 2010). Described that the formation of the Confucius Institute at Kabul University as part of a cultural exchange agreement in 2008 is a sign of China's policy of multilevel rendezvous. It is a very critical phase in outspreading the soft power of China as part of its inclusive Afghan strategy.

⁷ <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/03/08/what-is-behind-china-s-growing-attention-to-afghanistan-pub-59286>

⁸ <http://mantraya.org/economic-impact-of-obor-on-afghanistan/>

⁹ 2013-12, China's interests in Afghanistan: current projects and future prospects, James, Brian C. Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School.

Strategy of China in Afghanistan

The foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan stems from the declaration of Deng Xiaoping in 1992 that they must have a low profile and concentrate on national development. According to Shambaugh (2013), China must bite time, conceal brightness not become leaders but need to do something. The expert of China documented that Afghanistan has been struggling on application of this strategy, what China must be doing and how must keep its profile low?

Husaheng (2009) documented that China is playing a vibrant role in maintaining a low profile in Afghanistan and its preliminary stake in Xinjiang's security. This has consisted supporting efforts related to reconstruction in Afghanistan but without indulging to attach supply direction via Pakistan with the Northern Distributing Network of NATO. Huasheng (2014) stated that China seeks peace and stability in Afghanistan through resolving issues with the Taliban and strongly against war inside Afghanistan. The greater negative analysis of China seeks pressure by the United States for more Chinese participation as a mean of moving risk for China.

Xiangyu and Chunyan (2012) predicted that experts describe that China in Afghanistan looks chances to extend hands on energy and mines resources in Afghanistan, which could give a significant link for business and development of infrastructure in South Asia and Central Asia and the entire stake of China in these regions. The entire objective of China is enhancing its complete national power and economic condition in Asia (Rozman, 2010). China has been contributing its role in reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since 2001 by means of financial aids and physical assistance for Afghanistan. But the government of China does not wish to be a part of war in Afghanistan and has been contributing a low profile as the key aim of China is to boost its economy not to be part of any war.

Conclusion

It is vibrant from aforementioned discussion that the foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan has undergone a complete change in the recent few years. China has started acknowledging the fact that for a secure China, it has to protect its borders and for protecting its borders, it has to contribute a significant role in establishment and keeping of peace in entire Afghanistan. It has come to realize that how strategically and economically important Afghanistan could be. It has accepted the geo strategic importance of Afghanistan and has been trying to engage in negotiations with Afghan government officials to achieve their national interests at different levels.

Contribution of the Study

According to author knowledge this is the first ever study in Afghanistan that examines the foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan. Besides this the various views of the Chinese expert regarding this policy for Afghanistan and China are also discussed.

Future Recommendations

The present study covers most of the aspect of foreign policy of China towards Afghanistan but future studies may be conducted on;

- Afghanistan Foreign Policy towards China
- Comparing the foreign policies of both the countries and its impact
- Comparing the policies of both the countries and recommend suggestions what to add in

- the Foreign policy of Afghanistan in order to boost its ties with China and other neighbor Countries.

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