

China's Afghanistan Policy [CAP]

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Understanding Post-2014 Afghanistan

- The drawdown as envisaged has important bearing on the South Asian geopolitics, hitherto a regional theatre, now has permanent US presence.
- China's South Asian geopolitics has Afghan factor as a new development post-9/11.
- Binding of US security interest with the South Asian region has implications for China's Asiatic ascendancy.
- The extension of bilateral relations to trilateral and multi-lateral convergence of interest has increased with the developments in Af-Pak region.
- Pakistan remains vital to Afghan state for now, but that does not remain as a perpetual scenario.

Understanding Post-2014 Afghanistan

- The conflict has been lowered to sustainable levels and the economic imperatives are growing stronger.
- The internal cohesion of parties within Afghanistan has been the single biggest achievement in post-9/11 Afghanistan and if it retains its binding interest then present mineral wealth can be seen as a national wealth sufficient enough to sustain the economic challenges of the state.
- The traditional setup of society has always been the concern, but the efforts to delink fundamentalists has by and large gained ground. Taliban cannot even think of going back to old days.
- The regional initiative in post-2014 Afghanistan would be a limiting factor and the US along with NATO allies would continue to work with India in stabilising Afghanistan.

Understanding Post-2014 Afghanistan

- The Chinese government knows that war against terror and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan has been single largest effort of the global community of states under the leadership of the US unlike anywhere, not even Iraq. Therefore, the unilateral stakes for any regional power is not a feasible proposition, hitherto tried again and again since the fall of Najibullah government.
- The Russians, who have ample knowledge of Afghan affairs have carefully embedded their interest groups into present political structure and in fact, are one of the vital ingredients to the US success in Afghanistan, something that was unavailable previously.
- Under such scenario, China finds it difficult to have an independent Afghanistan policy, something it is used to seeking in the Asian order.

Regional Security in South Asia

- One of the important structuration process in the aftermath of 9/11 has been the redefining of South Asian Regional Security complex.
- The region hitherto seen as one fraught with Indo-Pak rivalry. And, indeed it linked to the scenario where nuclearisation of war was seen as the rising possibility.
- The degeneration of South Asian Regional security complex was one of the important achievements of post-9/11 Indo-US partnership.
- Therefore, the asymmetrical balance of power favouring India's regional dominance has been one of consequences of War against terror in South Asia.
- The Agni-4 tests were only approval of abovesaid intentions rather than any parity sought with China.

China's Previous Engagements in Afghanistan

- China has been one of the earliest supporter of Afghan mujahideen, not because it shared any ideological moorings with them, but because it certainly did not share the Soviet ideology.
- This was a marked departure from the previous extra-territorial engagements, where, the CPC used to support the leftist ideologues and guerilla groups waging the war against state in Third World countries.
- The Carter administration used Iran and China as major conduit to channelise American aid to reactionary forces, and China certainly colluded.
- The support to Islamists was in the form of supplying small arms, especially, the Soviet-made Kalashnikovs and ammunition.

China's perception on South Asia

- According to Prof. Zhao Gancheng, the US has been conducting a rebalancing strategy in the global arena that focuses more on Asia-Pacific.
- He also believes that South Asian balance of power has been significantly affected by this strategy, as the strategic autonomies enjoyed by the rest-of-India South Asian states has been significantly liquidated, notably that of Pakistan.
- This has an important bearing on China's South Asia policy.

Chinese Policy Imperatives in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan may become US's Achilles heel and that can possibly help China in promoting its own **Asian Rebalancing Strategy**.
- The Regional Security Complex scenario to be built that can put Af-Pak as a positively hyphenated term effectively marginalising Indian presence in Afghanistan.
- The mineral and resource exploration policy that can be consolidated across Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan.
- It wishes to engage the Afghan state in accordance to the sensitivities of the Pakistani concerns. This means it is willing to deal with the Haqqanis and the Quetta Shura, apart from the Afghan state.

Chinese Policy Imperatives in Afghanistan

- China has shown so far reluctance for military cooperation with the Afghan National Army, though some material supply is likely. But, the growing Indian involvement in rebuilding ANA concerns China equally well, just as Pakistan.
- China's Afghanistan policy is relatively independent of Sino-Indian relations, but China growing anxieties with the Taliban taking interest in Xinjiang separatist movement and its greater degree of frustration with Pakistan might induce some policy convergence.
- China has also been looking towards multilateral arrangements with Iran and the Central Asian Republics, under the framework of SCO that allows it greater flexibility at the cost of its policy convergence with Pakistan.

Dynamic Factors affecting CAP

- Sino-Pak relations is the fulcrum for CAP.
- Sino-US relations and Asiatic order co-factor into CAP.
- US-Pak relations is the limiting factor for CAP.
- India's rising profile factors into CAP.
- China's relations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan factor into CAP.
- Russian influence over Central Asia factor into CAP.

Sino-Pak relations

- The long cherished friendship became the most coveted one for Pakistan once the North Waziristan assault was resisted by Pakistan in post-Osama Af-Pak region.
- It strongly went into the all out embracing the Chinese presence including the camouflaged one in Northern Areas. Although, this did not weigh too heavy on the Sino-Indian relations. Pakistan's loss of strategic depth in Afghanistan have been soothed somewhat by accommodation from China.
- China has been trying to re-create the regional security complex by providing extra-ordinary nuclear cooperation to Pakistan that would help exercise latter, 'strategic autonomies', as referred by Zhao Gancheng.
- China has been stopping short of providing financial aid to Pakistani state in a major way, but its presence in Sindh for exploration of energy resources, rare earth minerals in Baluchistan and Hydel projects in KP have caught an eye.

Sino-Pak relations

- The protest against the Zulfiqarabad urban project, and attack on its consulate in Karachi this year amply revealed that Chinese presence is not immune to attacks. The things went further worse with the killing of Chinese woman Jiang Hua in Peshawar in February 2012. Incidentally, the TTP claimed responsibility in revenge to the Chinese oppression of Uyghur Muslims.
- The growing number of non-state actors threatening Pakistani state has made China's presence vulnerable in Pakistan. China sees that sole channelisation of its Afghanistan policy via friendship with Pakistan which increases the strategic challenge.
- The strategic depth sought by Uyghur militants in Af-Pak region makes it an imperative for China to seek foothold in Afghanistan for a successful culling policy towards separatists.

Sino-US relations

- China has been looking desperately to counter-balance the US growing strategic dominance in east and southeast Asia. North Korea remained an Achilles heel, but then it could supplant the challenges that emanated from Japan or Vietnam along its eastern seaboard.
- China got its opportunity in the form of reigning economic crises in Eurozone and the US slowdown, which significantly altered the domestic opinion on war against terror. The US badly needed allies in the trillion dollar plus war, and China had just set its eyes on such an opportunity.
- Though, China did not contribute to \$4.1 billion required to raised the Afghan National Army, it certainly agreed to provide formal training to 300+ Aghan police personnel.

Sino-US relations

- It is now being felt that all that war effort gone into pacifying the Taliban stand only to be reaped into benefit by Chinese firms in metal extraction. The fact remains whatever strengthens the Afghan state at the moment indirectly helps relieve burden of the Americans who have been funding it as their 51st state.
- The US and China might seek common policy goal over South Asia, just as they sought in the aftermath of nuclear tests, when both, referred to maintain the balance of power. Therefore, the China may cajole US into recreating this balance of power in South Asia. This is visible in terms of aid and armaments that have been given to Pakistan in last two years.
- And, China might use its influence over Pakistan to launch an offensive against the Haqqanis.

US-Pak relations

- The US-Pak relations contextualise much of the discourse on Afghan conflict. They also have been source to major realignments in Asia. The fact that after November 2011 incident when NATO supplies were cut, the US had serious policy challenge to get its supply lines working for sustaining war momentum.
- China had simply refused to be a supply route. Russia provided the succour when Northern routes were opened with the help of Central Asian states.
- One of the important feature of the war against terror has been the 'Dronization of War'. This strategy has its pitfalls, but it has seriously dented the duplicity of ISI/Pak Army, who were providing the time-effective intelligence to rogue groups often escaping before the attack.

US-Pak relations

- China has been quite critical of western intervention in Syria, but same diatribe is missing on the issue of sovereignty of Pakistan, though it formally criticised the November 2011 incident.
- The killing of Osama bin-Laden in the heart of Pakistani state has taken off the sheen from Pakistan's credibility and China finds it hard often to salvage the situation in favour of Pakistan.
- The US also looks into the growing concerns of the Afghan state over cross-border shelling effectively meaning opening of another front for the Pakistan Army.
- This situation is very typical one, where Chinese military presence in Pakistan may become a reality in form of leased air or naval bases.

India's Rising Profile

- India's long professed stand on terrorism was something seen only through the myopic lens of rivalry with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, having fought number of wars.
- The detachment of Kashmir issue from the global threat of terrorism brought a new chapter where lessons from India carried profound value, whilst dealing with the situation in Afghanistan.
- India grabbed every bit of opportunity showing its potential and willingness to go at lengths in war against terror. This also opened a new chapter for strategic dialogue between India and the US, that now has various mature dimensions.
- However, the most significant consequence was the acknowledgement of India as the South Asian power, with possibilities of influence beyond the region as well.

India's Rising Profile

- The \$2 billion dollar plus aid and assistance that India has provided to Afghanistan is worthy of acknowledgement. Indian presence is felt by all sections of society in Afghanistan, especially, health, food, transportation, electricity, roads something that ordinary Afghans get into touch in daily life.
- The contribution to Afghanistan still does not stop here as more than 2000 scholarships are being offered to Afghan students for studying in India, and India remains primary destination for medical tourism for most of the South Asians. India has delivered important skill structures for raising the Afghan National Army.
- India is no match to Chinese potential to deliver, but China is no match to Indian commitments to deliver amid such environment. The sacrifice of Indian personnel have been of the highest order, with the loss of one brigadier, an IFS officer, one artist and numerous defence and skilled professionals.

China's Central Asian connections

- They are one of the vital linkages while conducting the Afghanistan policy. China has not forgotten the memories of opium menace. China seized more than 5000 tons of acetic anhydride destined to Afghanistan in 2002.
- Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are one of the major conduits to drug trafficking in Central Asia. The opium production was taken up by Taliban and Northern Alliance equally, to fund their war designs. The term narco-terrorism comprehensively defines the linkages that often are used by extremists/separatists for countering the state resources.
- Narco-terrorism is a potential threat to CARs as well.
- Much of China's restive region of XUAR forms contiguous territory with Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

China's Central Asian connections

- Chinese investments in Central Asia are crucial to maintain its energy security. The gas transportation from Caspian Sea region has been one of the engines of *Xibu da Khaifa* programme.
- The growing influence of Islamists in Tajikistan is a concern for China as there is presence of Tajik and Turkic populations in China.
- This year, Turkey was given observer status in SCO alongwith Afghanistan underscoring the importance of ethno-religious factors across the Sino-Central Asian borders.
- Also, the colour revolution in Kyrgyzstan revealed the potential to induce various human rights protests among the minorities.

Sino-Russian relations

- Afghan war is the grim reminder worst days in Sino-Russian relations. China saw Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978 as an opportunity to weaken Moscow-Delhi axis.
- The clash of Sino-Soviet forces along Khyrgyz border and at other points were the sore points for China.
- China did not share the ideological moorings with Soviet Union and believed latter as an obstacle to its own Asiatic order. Afghanistan's close relations with Soviet Union concerned China and it therefore, chose Pakistan to counter influence bothways.
- China declared the 1978 Soviet act as aggression and threat to China's security. Deng Xiaoping had alarmist view on this move.

Sino-Russian relations

- The shadows of Vietnam war loomed large on Afghanistan in 1980s. Chinese believed that a Soviet-backed Afghan state would invite confrontation along Wakhan corridor.
- It strongly opposed the 1978 Moscow-Kabul friendship treaty as an unholy alliance fret with hegemonic designs. In fact, Chinese equally believed in warm water hypothesis, that Soviets, would control the energy corridor and effectively blockade the Chinese presence in South Asia.
- Soviet support to Hanoi and Chinese predicament in great power rivalry in Southeast Asia lent some retracted Chinese position over Afghanistan.
- The post-Soviet Eurasia had lot to offer to recover the lost geopolitical ground by the Chinese, and Russia only willingly acceded to in order to make it free of western influence.

Static factors affecting CAP

- XUAR challenge (ethno-religious extremism and separatism)
- Islamic extremism
- Mineral resources of Afghanistan

XUAR Challenge

- The Uyghurs have been one of the indomitable communities of China, though Khyrgyz and Tajik too resent the Hannization of the Xinjiang province.
- The essential reason being the cultural differences that often are instrumental in the process of othering the people and often goes acceptable policy through the lower-rank officials and party workers.
- The Uyghurs have been discriminated on the basis of their socio-economic backwardness and are often ascribed as lumpen, just like the Romas in Europe.
- The differences in wages and poor access to state institutions have left them at disadvantage with the migrating Hans, who are better educated and well-paid.

XUAR Challenge

- The discrimination resulting into identity politics have created spaces for political functions of ethnicity and religion. There is conscious behaviour to object state constructing ethno-religious identity is visible in the ramazan festival.
- The Af-Pak theatre is a conundrum of Islamic extremism and from there the support to Uyghur militants has been noticed in the recent years. Pakistan indeed has handed over a few of them to China.
- China's difficulty is not militant Islam, but the political Islam. The human rights groups have been vocal against Chinese restriction of freedoms to minorities including the religious freedoms. Turkey recently expressed some sympathy towards the Uyghur diaspora and consequently their Prime Minister was given a visit to the region early this year.

Islamic Extremism

- This has been one of the cardinal principles of India's Afghanistan policy, not to allow Taliban and the like-minded people back into power. China has been wary of the consequences given the recent events in Pakistan, but China also believes that these might become a larger danger if they take seat in Central Asia.
- There the support for Turkic Muslims would be the most potential threat rather than any possibility of Al-Qaeda or Taliban taking interest.
- The presence of Hizb-ul-Tahrir was visible in Xinjiang recently, an organisation that has fairly good presence in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Islamic Extremism

- The growing role of extremists in regional geopolitics is a new phenomenon that seems to accentuate post-9/11.
- The Talibans and other terror organisations are no longer under the penumbra of ISI/Army, in fact, they hardly see latter' s worth without money and arms. Therefore, many of them like TTP have turned against their mentors.
- This geopolitics of Islam (RBR), has one of the most dangerous consequences for the South Asian region. It not only threatens the states of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also allow the global jihadi elements to embed into regional scenario.
- A scenario that may well extend into China. And, it is something, for which even Pakistan has no answers. They are being used as pawns in the Af-Pak region now, and their extension may well go into calibrating China's geopolitical influence.

Mineral wealth of Afghanistan

- This has been a much touted fact that whosoever invests in Afghanistan's hitherto untapped riches is going to make bounties and China seems the putative reaper.
- The mineral wealth of Afghanistan was mapped long-back by the Soviets and in fact, one of the earliest oil explorations in northern Afghanistan was taken up for supplies to Central Asia.
- The mineral wealth of Afghanistan lies in modest energy reserves and metals, and primarily in semi-precious stones. There is a hope of rare earth minerals, but remain undeclared so far.
- China made giant forays by winning the contract for Aynak Copper mines at \$3.2 billion. And, it is seen as harbinger to much awaited footprints of Chinese investments.

Mineral wealth of Afghanistan

- Chinese evince a very different approach to getting into Afghanistan. Apart from allegations of kickbacks to Karzai's relatives, they have promised to build mosques in the region, alongwith education and health facilities.
- They fetished their approach with experiences in Africa albeit not a very successful one. The recent odds faced by them in Mazar-i-Sharif revealed the nature of difficulties. The Chinese firms were asked to pay the protection money by local militia close to Dostum. And, the oil exploration work practically halted.
- The \$3.2 billion Aynak Copper project is no lesser mirage. China has made promises to built railways, however, the threat levels reveal their biding away from commitments. The revenues promised to Afghan state are a distant dream.

Between Pragmatism and Uncertainty

- China's Afghanistan policy is stuck between pragmatism and uncertainty. The failure of Afghan state would be the best face saver, and if that does not remain an option then the conflict across Af-Pak is a very likely possibility.
- The volatility across Durand line is a sufficient cause that stops a creation of South Asian Regional Security Complex, hitherto exemplified by Chinese scholars.
- The immediate option would be to hedge Chinese role under the framework of SCO, and allow the Central Asian States to take up the initiative. Russia has already supported the Tajik initiative that involves them and Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- CAP can have far better impact if it hinges on current thaw in Indo-Pak relations and the desire to reverse the 'narrative'.

India-China relations- Epilogue!

- India recently requested to open Lhasa consulate and it was rejected for obvious reasons. The degree of mistrust is still persistent and CAP can be put under caveat to this mistrust.
- As India makes foray into Myanmar, so does China in Afghanistan. The Chinese media took a supercilious view of it, and a similar sentiment may boomerang for them on CAP.
- Therefore, so long as South Asian Geopolitics is contested by China challenging India; the asymmetries of power are bound to be balanced by the US and non-state actors. Both, are detrimental to a successful CAP.

THANKS!