

**AFGHANISTAN AND REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY: CHALLENGES
AND PROSPECTS**

By

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Tables of Contents	Pages Numbers
Acknowledgment	III
Dedication	IV
List of Abbreviation	VIII
ABSTRACT	XII
INTRODUCTION	1
Problem statement:	7
Core Argument:	8
Research Questions:	8
Objectives of Research:	8
Literature Review:	9
Research Gap:	15
Conceptual Framework:	15
Research Methodology:	20
Significance of the Study:	21
Delimitation:	22
Organization of the study:	22
CHAPTER ONE AN OVERVIEW OF AFGHANISTAN: GEOPOLITICAL AND GEO-ECONOMICS PERSPECTIVE	25
Afghanistan and Regional Connectivity: Brief History	25
1.1 Afghanistan and Geo-economics:	31
1.2 Theory of Geopolitics and Afghanistan.....	33
1.3 Afghanistan's Geopolitical Dynamics and the Major Power:.....	35
1.4 An Overview of Afghanistan as a Transit Route	36
1.4.1 Alexander Empire: (336B.C-323B.C)	36
1.4.2 Silk Road (130 BCE-1453 CE).....	38

1.4.3	Kushan Empire (30AD–375 AD) and Commercial Activity	39
1.5	The Rise of Islam and Afghanistan as a Trade Transit	42
1.5.1	Mongol Empire (1206-1368) and Trade Expansion through Afghanistan	43
1.5.2	Mughal Empire: (1526 AD-1857AD) and Trade Expansion through Afghanistan....	44
1.6	Modern Afghanistan (1747AD...CE)	46
CHAPTER TWO		53
CHANGING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE REGIONAL		53
CONNECTIVITY OF AFGHANISTAN		53
2.1	Afghanistan: A Significant Entity	57
2.2	Afghanistan and Regional Connectivity	58
2.3	Importance of Afghanistan for Central Asia	59
2.4	Importance of Afghanistan for China	61
2.5	Middle East and Afghanistan.....	63
2.6	New Great Game and the Relevance of Afghanistan to Central and South Asia	64
2.7	Energy Security and Regional Cooperation through Afghanistan	68
2.7.1	Energy Cooperation between the Neighboring Countries	69
2.7.2	Afghanistan’s Connectivity for Energy Cooperation	71
2.7.3	Energy and Socio-Economic Impacts on Afghanistan	73
CHAPTER THREE		75
CHALLENGES TO AFGHANISTAN’S REGIONAL ROLE.....		75
3.1	Internal Challenges	75
3.1.1.	Domestic Political Instability	76
3.1.2	Absence of Peace	77
3.1.3	Social Issues	79
3.1.4	Economics Issues	80
3.1.5	Security Issues.....	82
3.1.6	Corruption	84
3.1.7	Narcotic Trafficking.....	87
3.2	External Challenges	89
3.2.1	Foreign Involvement	90
3.2.2	Regional and International Terrorism	92
3.2.4	New Great Game between the Power Countries	95
CHAPTER FOUR		100
PROSPECTS FOR AFGHANISTAN’S REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY		100
4.1	Afghanistan’s Journey from a Buffer to a Hub	100
4.2	Cross Road for Trades	102

4.3 Trade Transit Corridors	104
4.4 Railway Corridor	105
4.4.1 Five Nations Railway Corridor (FNRC)	105
4.4.2 Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway (TAT)	107
4.4.3 China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)	108
4.4.4 New Silk Road	110
4.4.5 Lapis Lazuli Corridor	113
4.4.6 Wakhan Corridor	114
4.4.7 Chabahar Port	118
4.4.8 International North-South Trade Corridor (INSTC)	119
4.4.9 Fiber Optic link with China through Afghanistan’s Wakhan Corridor	120
4.4.10 Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)	122
4.5 Energy Projects:	123
4.5.1 Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Gas Line Project (TAPI)	124
4.5.2 Central Asia and South Asia 1000 (CASA 1000)	126
4.5.3 Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (TAP-500 KV)	127
4.5.4 Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan (TUTAP)	128
4.5.6 Afghanistan Tajikistan Gas Pipeline (ATGP)	129
4.6 Framework of Regional and International Engagement	129
4.7 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	129
4.8 Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA)	131
4.9 Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)	132
4.10 Asian Development Bank (ADB)	133
Conclusion	136
Findings:	139
Recommendations:	141
Bibliography	143

List of Abbreviation

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APTTA	Afghanistan Pakistan Transit and Trade Agreement
AQAP	Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CASA-1000	Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project
CBM	Confidence Building Measure
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CN-CBM	Counter Narcotics Confidence Building Measure
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union Delegation to Afghanistan
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FEZ	Free Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence (of Pakistan)
ISPR	Inter-Services Public Relations
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MCIS	Moscow Conference on International Security
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of Afghanistan) MSR Maritime Silk Road

MTC	Military-Technical Cooperation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUG	National Unity Government
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
QCG	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RECCA	Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan
RTG	Regional Technical Group
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SDP	Small and Community Development Projects
SNSC	Supreme National Security Council (of Iran)
SPECA	Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline

TAT	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway
TTP	Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan
TUTAP	Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Electricity Plan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WB	World Bank.

ABSTRACT

Afghanistan holds a significant position in the Asian continent for connectivity among regions like South and Central Asia, the Middle East through Iran, and to Europe through ongoing energy projects. Afghanistan's geographical position always made it prominent to the interests of great powers as a crossroads of many civilizations in ancient times to the contemporary projects of regional connectivity and known to be called as the 'heart of Asia'. But the country holds a war-torn history. Afghanistan remains prone to internal and external skirmishes and has never become a stable nation. However, the tottering history of the country could not diminish its geopolitical significance, particularly in the current global and regional settings that made it both geopolitically and geo-economically crucial. This research focuses on assessing, redefining, and restructuring the role of Afghanistan with a development outlook of regional connectivity in the Asian continent. In fact, the recent emerging global and regional scenario demands Afghanistan to redesign its domestic and foreign policies to benefit from economic projects. It is argued that if Afghanistan plays its role in regional connectivity through multiple energy and transit projects among connecting regions, it will enhance the prospects of Afghanistan's peace and economic development. The research is knitted around the concepts of geopolitical and geo-economic theories which argue that the geographical and economic factors (resources) influence a state's position in international trade and states utilize their resources & geography to influence domestic and international politics. This qualitative research is based on secondary data resources. It is descriptive, analytical, and policy-oriented.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Regional Connectivity, geo-economics, geopolitical, Economic Development, Energy, Trade & Transit

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan remains an important and historical place for invaders, trader's communication forces, ideas, capital, goods, and the gathering place of great civilizations like the Aryans, Bactrians, Buddhists, and, Muslims. ¹ Afghanistan has a history of 5000 years with archeological and prehistoric cultural proof, which is emblematic of the fact that it is one of the oldest civilizations, and it also played a role in the evolution of human thoughts and culture. The early civilization of Afghanistan owes an important amount to its favorable geographical position, as in this land different civilizations of the world collided, for instance, China, Iran, India, Rome, and Greece.

It connects four most populous and resourceful regions, which include South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and the Europe. It is very significant to the Eurasian Continental Trade Network due to its vital role as the connecting hub. In addition to that, Afghanistan not only works as a connecting hub but also plays a vital role as a land bridge in the Eurasian continental trade networks as it provides a chance for economic cooperation to different partners, which includes regional projects in significant areas, for instance, trade, energy, transit, and transportation. ²

Afghanistan has a historically significant position. The fact that the trade route between South Asia and South West China has existed for a long time cannot be underestimated. For instance, in the 2nd century, the bamboo canes and cloth from South West China in a market in Balkh (modern Afghanistan) were noticed by Zhang Qian, and he was told by people that traders

¹ - Amin, Hamiddullah, "The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan", University of Durham, online, (1967).

² - Rawan N., Grishin O. E. "Importance of Afghanistan for Regional Security in South and East Asia". *Post-Soviet Issues* 7, no. 11 (2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2020-7-1-94-103>

had gotten the goods from India, showing the trade routes from South West China to India and then to Central Asia. Thus, along Afghanistan's business highways, both countries, including Afghanistan and China, were engaged in commerce and cultural exchange.³ Lapis lazuli (material and corridor) was one of the most common materials that were not only obtained through these routes but also traded alongside a trade route that connected Turkmenistan and the Indo-Iranian boundaries.

According to ancient times, Afghanistan had its own importance and historical role as a regional connection center in trade, as its geographical location included the Silk Road, which provided Afghanistan with a unique location connecting Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.⁴ The Silk Road and the trade along this route made great history for Afghanistan and the Central Asia. The Silk Road played a vital role in advancing all the regions located alongside it. Consequently, various links that ran via Afghanistan and Pakistan between South Asia and Central Asia remained significant for cultural exchange, and the Tibetan plateau was used for important communications.

The silk route of the South, which is also known as the Tea Horse Road was made for different animals and humans in a parade that started from Yunnan (southwest China's province) to the south of Asia via high lands.⁵ Although there were planned army exercises along with movement of people and businesses from one country to another along this path, the route was

³ - Ibid

⁴ - Salah, Zobair, "Afghanistan: A Junction of Asia's Connectivity" (2022).

<https://www.nbr.org/publication/afghanistan-a-junction-of-asias-connectivity/>

⁵ - M. Azim Wardak, *Acting Deputy Director General Economic Cooperation Department*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Infrastructure Connectivity in Afghanistan, Issyk Kul Kyrgyzstan,

just claimed as being built for tribute rather than trade. Thus, the trade of items like salt, drugs, skins, silver, and diamonds became a crucial deciding factor for the economy.⁶

Similarly, Afghanistan has a volatile geopolitical situation. Afghanistan remains involved in global power politics since its beginning as a sovereign state. During the early twentieth and late nineteenth centuries, it has remained as a buffer zone for both the British and Russia. Therefore, feudalism was reinstated in the area along with civil war among several tribes that started and lasted for a very long time. This area started to fragment after the expansion of the transit trade and British colonial empires in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁷

Afghanistan was also affected both economically and politically in the era of the Cold War between the USA and USSR during the 1950s and 1990s, and thus the average growth rate of Afghanistan's economy remained low during the latter period of this war. The rivalries between both superpowers at that time, which included the USA and the USSR, made Afghanistan a stage of war, which not only affected the political, social, and economic situations of the country but also greatly harmed the Afghan people as well. Afghanistan remained a battleground for different force until the war ended along with the devastation and collapse of the USSR.

Subsequently, this collapse changed the whole trends of Afghan life, including political, economic, and social situations. The USSR's withdrawal pushed Afghanistan into more devastating and terrible conditions than it had ever been in. After the withdrawal and desolation of USSR, domestic war started between the different groups of Afghan mujahedeen and they destroyed Afghanistan. Finally afghan Taliban come to power and they took over the afghan

⁶ - Mineral Resources in Afghanistan, Submitted to the Office of the A.1. D., Representative for Afghan Affair, Submitted by Nathan Associates Inc. and Louis Berger International, Inc. February 1992.

⁷ - Ibid

government. At that time Taliban had relations with the Al-Qaida organization which were the alleged perpetrators of the 9/11 incidence. 9/11 events further led the country into an unstable war position leading to US invasion that lasted for almost 20 years. The US presence in Afghanistan remain failed to redefine, upgrade or restructure Afghanistan into a stable sovereign nation. And, finally, the country once again became ruled by the Taliban after the US withdrawal.

International relations and the patterns of state interaction have changed over the period. In the contemporary global scenario, the economic and political integration among state and nonstate actors has restructured the global order shifting to the geopolitical, geo-economics, and geostrategic demands. The geopolitical theory relates back to the ancient times of Aristotle and Machiavelli who argue that geography remains fundamental to state foreign policy. It remains basic to diplomatic relations, economic resources, and the art of war.⁸ The geo-economics theoretical perspective, argues that the use of economic instruments helps promote the national interest and the geopolitical benefits for states. Blackwell and Harris define that geo-economics enable states to develop and exercise power from the economic perspective rather than the strictly geographical perspective and always get a positive outcome. Further, they believe that it combines the logic of geopolitics with economic tools.⁹ Despite having a war-torn background, Afghanistan is enriched with untapped natural resources. Its geographical position makes it viable to transportation, trade, and transit connecting the main Asian regions of the world South and Central Asia to Eurasia.

⁸ Geoffrey, Sloan and Colin S., Gray. *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History (Geopolitical Theory)*. 2017.

⁹ Blackwill, R.D., and Harris, J. *War by Other means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Harvard, Belknap Press. 2016.

The geographical location and economic resources have demanded Afghanistan to reassess and redefine its role in the regional and global context.¹⁰ Despite the challenges, the role of Afghanistan as a bridge linking Central Asia with the growing demands of South Asia, the Middle East and to Europe brought many prospects for Afghanistan benefiting from its prime location. The current studies of regional and economic development highlighted that Afghanistan has significance to facilitate trade, energy, transportation, and transit corridors that would ultimately strengthen its economic growth and stability. There are many regional structures that define Afghanistan's regional role in connecting regions of South and Central Asia and beyond, like Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) to enhance trade and regional connectivity and creating prospects for a successful transition to peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.

The prosperity of these regional developmental projects encompasses a wide range of policies, mostly including the facilitation of products, capital, services, and people. Regional connectivity and integration for Afghanistan, is, of course, very important and needed in order to establish connections with the outside markets.¹¹ Consequently, successful regional structures help enhance the prospects of regional commerce, transit potential, and transport. Similarly, due to abundance of natural resources and Afghanistan's favorable geographical position, joining these projects has important long-term advantages in terms of growth of economies, income, and

¹⁰ Anwar, Z. "Pakistan and the Geopolitics of Supply Routes to Afghanistan". *Journal of Political Studies*, 20, no. 2 (2013): 105–123. Retrieved from <http://biblioteca.uprag.edu:2048/>

¹¹ - Safi, Mariam and Alizada, Bismillah, "Afghanistan: Prospects and Challenges to Regional Connectivity" *The Diplomat*, Apr, 19, 2019, URL:<https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/afghanistan-prospects-and-challenges-to-regional-connectivity>.

employment for both Afghanistan and its neighbors.¹² However, in order to make the greatest use of the comparative advantages of the area, it should be joined hand in hand by a more comprehensive economic integration as well.

According to an analysis, the important strategic benefits, for instance, economic growth, social well-being, and security will be produced by regional integration that will benefit both Afghanistan and the connecting actors. A peaceful and prosperous environment inside Afghanistan will not only provide benefits to Afghanistan but also to the international community. A friendly and cooperative Afghan government will be in the interests of both Afghanistan and the regions alongside it.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan remains unsuccessful in its pursuit of political legitimacy. Most importantly, it is recognized that as long as there is war and unrest in Afghanistan, the country will not be politically stable and so will not be able to grow or strengthen itself.¹³ It is a fact that due to the geographical location of Afghanistan, it can compete with most of the strong economies of the world, like China, India, Iran, and Pakistan. Additionally, the political weakness and turmoil in neighboring countries like Pakistan and India also contribute negatively to the economic situation of Afghanistan. The hard political environment between Pakistan and India contributes negatively to Afghanistan's economy and overall situation, such as Afghanistan is still out of the CPEC project. Similarly, the sanctions from the US on Iran have also had negative impacts on Afghanistan's economy, including transmittals, imports, and the illegal movement of the currency from Afghanistan to Iran. For example, an agreement known as the

¹² - Ibid

¹³ - Hekmatullah Azamy, Edited by Anna Gussarova "Current Challenges to Central Asia and Afghanistan: Towards a Better World", CAISS (Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies), the Representation of the FriedrichEbertStiftung in Kazakhstan, 11 May 2016.

Afghanistan Pakistan Transit and Trade Agreement (APTTA) in 2010 that was signed for 5 years was not renewed due to the interference of India in Afghanistan and Pakistan's relationship.¹⁴ Another important drawback is with the huge decrease in foreign aid since the withdrawal of foreign troops. It has further weakened the economy of the country.¹⁵

Afghanistan holds many prospects for regional connectivity.¹⁶ Despite years of isolation and unrest in Afghanistan, the country still has massive potential. However, successful regional structures are the only solution to bring the commerce of the region to a high level, transport, and transit potential, due to which there are long-term advantages to the income, economy, employment, social conditions, political contributions, and economic growth for both the Afghan people and the people of the neighboring countries as well.

Problem statement:

This research focuses on evaluating Afghanistan's potential as a regional actor with many prospects of regional connectivity and economic growth through transit and trade linkages between South and Central Asia and the other connecting regions. This research also aims at highlighting the problems that remain an obstruction to the growth and development of Afghanistan—both internal and external. A variety of internal challenges include political instability, overwhelming insecurity, severe poverty, a stagnant or sluggish economy, unemployment, underdevelopment, low infrastructure, power-tussle among various tribes/ethnicities and lack of financial resources that remain consequential in damaging its

¹⁴ - Mohammad Yonus Noorzi, "Afghanistan: Regional Connectivity Hub": p:295, 298.

¹⁵ - Safi, Mariam and Alizada, Bismellah, "Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative Review, Analysis and Prospects".

¹⁶ - [Hasib Danish Alikozaj](#), "Taliban Vows to Protect TAPI Gas Pipeline Project", *Voice of America (VOA)* report, February 24, 2018

<https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-to-protect-tapi-gas-pipeline-project/4268767.html>

national character and growth. Political disharmony between Afghanistan and other neighbors and the scourge of regional and transnational terrorism, in addition, yet remain external barriers for regional integration. This dissertation aims at evaluating the role of Afghanistan in the current geopolitical and geo-economic setting while addressing the challenges in order to redefine its role as an active economic bridging player in Asia and the other connecting regions.

Core Argument:

It is argued that the war history, conflicts, and political upheavals influenced by multiple challenges—home and abroad over the years—has restricted Afghanistan’s regional role. However, Afghanistan has great prospects to play its role as a bridging actor between South and Central Asia to ensure peace, stability and economic development not only for Afghanistan but for the region also.

Research Questions:

1. How Afghanistan has been significant historically to the major powers?
2. Why Afghanistan remains indolent for regional development?
3. What prospects Afghanistan has to play its role as a regional connectivity actor?

Objectives of Research:

1. This research aims to explore the role of Afghanistan as a trade and transit route over the centuries.
2. It focuses to examine the challenges Afghanistan has faced over decades that prevented it from working as a normal sovereign entity.
3. The main objective includes elucidating the prospects and opportunities that can help Afghanistan to redefine and play its role in regional connectivity.

Literature Review:

There is a lot of literature published and available on Afghanistan since the country has always remains a significant entity in world politics throughout. Many scholarships wrote about Afghanistan's weak character, its war history, the story of invasions, the exploitations of super powers for their vested interests, a hub of social and political failures and so on. My research has taken a bit different aspect on Afghanistan from a new lens of political economic and regional integration of Afghanistan with other regions. I have gone through a vast variety of literature that includes books, article, reviews, reports etc.

Anna Deister and Mohammed Shinwari in their report about 'Afghanistan Reconnected: Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014', published in 2014 explain that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a non-coastal nation in South-Central Asia. Most descriptions place it in the Middle East, South Asia, or Central Asia. It shares boundaries with Iran to the west, Pakistan to the south and east, far northeast China, and central Asia to the north. Afghanistan is not a coastline nation, which puts it in an unfavorable position. They also place it at one of the oldest crossings for commerce and the exchange of all sorts of goods.¹⁷ A considerable amount of employment in Afghanistan and throughout the world produced by the expansion of cross-border trade and infrastructure.

According to *Larry Wentz and Karen E's* in 'Analysis of an Intervention' published in 2013 talks that Afghanistan has a very long history and was one of the first hubs for the Silk Road and migration. It has been crucial in having a geostrategic location, linking eastern sections of Asia with western areas of the Middle East. The territory has always been an

¹⁷ - Anna Deister and Mohammed Shinwari, *Afghanistan Reconnected: Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014* (New York) 14-15.

excellent target for different attackers and served as a base from which regional powers invaded nearby territories to establish their kingdoms.¹⁸

A report on ‘Afghanistan's geopolitical analysis’ published by the *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IESE)*, General Directorate of Institutional Relations, in April 2011 narrates that Afghanistan has historically served as a convenient route for traders and conquerors to transport people and commodities from the West to the East, between the Middle East and India. Alexander the Great, who lived in 328 BC, picked this course. Due to its importance as a junction for Asian trade networks, Afghanistan is no longer only a conduit for invaders.¹⁹

According to *David Jensen's* ‘Afghanistan Wakhan Mission Technical Report’ published in 2011, the Wakhan corridor, which runs through Afghanistan's northeastern Pamir Mountains and is in close proximity to China, is the clearest indication that these two countries should not engage in armed conflict. The reports further carries that due to snow, China's border has remained blocked for at least five months out of the year, making it one of the longest in the world. However, this route can be useful in the installation of new gas and oil pipelines to replace the ones currently used to deliver energy goods to China.²⁰

A write up published by Ambassador (Ret.) Asif Durrani, Muhammad Nawaz, Afghanistan Peace Process Outlook’ published in April 2011, describes that Afghanistan's isolation from the five Central Asian nations to the south, the bumpy terrain and nearly impassable mountains to the east, and Iran to the west make contact with South Asia unlikely

¹⁸ - Lessons from US Advisory Work in Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector, *Analysis of an Intervention*, Larry Wentz and Karen E. Black, Editors, Published for the Defense Information Systems Agency.

¹⁹ - Directorate-general of institutional relation, geopolitical analysis of Afghanistan, Spanish institute for strategic study (IEEE), ministry of defense, April 2011.

²⁰ - Ibid, 2

and challenging. The authors argue that it is a difficult process to finally connect the locations, and it requires building and improving infrastructure all throughout Afghanistan. Once it is finished, it would create great economic and social opportunities for Afghans as well as those in other regions.

They further expressed that Building regional infrastructure would support the country's fragile economy, while doing more would benefit South and Central Asian nations by enhancing regional involvement, advancing their economic interests, and facilitating access to new markets. A comparable arrangement would increase trade, the movement of people, and the exchange of ideas between the two areas, promoting modernization, employment growth, and economic advancement. South and Central Asian nations are highly motivated to work together in favor of an Afghanistan that is stable, peaceful, and democratic.²¹ It further highlights that there are already active energy infrastructure projects connecting communities in South Asia that will receive additional hydropower from Central Asia, thanks to the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission Project. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Electricity Interconnection Project, which will facilitate the exchange of power among these parties, and the Turkmenistan Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline, which will transport gas among the participating nations, are both ongoing. Eleven nations were brought together by the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program, a sizable and extensive effort to support economic initiatives throughout Central, South, and East Asia. To expand corridors, however, and maximize the advantages of regional connectivity, new road and railroad arrangements will be essential.²²

²¹ - Ambassador (Retd.), Asif Durrani, Muhammad Nawaz, and other, Afghanistan Peace Process Outlook, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), 9-11

²² - Ibid, 12

In the book titled '*Finish the Job: Jump-Start Afghanistan's Economy*' published in 2012, the author discusses that the non-coastal nations of Central Asia are physically partially encircled by the two superpowers, China and Russia. Economically, Central Asia is likewise surrounded. The region's imports and exports are dominated by Russia and China. By establishing land routes via Afghanistan, Central Asian nations would have access to Pakistan, India, and the greater IndoPacific region on the one hand, and Iran on the other. Regional ties will also aid Afghanistan's struggling economy, particularly by connecting it to India, the largest market in the area. Better agreements would enable nations to conduct a range of trade activities using less expensive ground transportation routes than they now have access to. The new agreement's economic ties will encourage South and Central Asian nations to support Afghanistan in both the public and private sectors.²³

Muhammad Rizwanullah, Liang Li Zhi in '*Role of CPEC in Enhancing Mutual Trust and Regional Integration*', published in April 2020, narrates that a stable Afghanistan will likewise help Pakistan the most. The opening of Afghanistan border will provide Pakistan with a direct land connection to Central Asia. Pakistan would have a more practical and effective option than its present routes through Iran or China. Through this connectivity, Pakistan would be able to reach out to new markets and cement ties with its muslim-majority neighbors. The basis for a longterm collaboration would be laid out by this interaction.²⁴

Pashmina Mughal and Sadia Suleman in their article '*Global Geopolitical Dynamics and Prospects for Afghanistan's Regional Connectivity*' published in 2021, highlight that

²³ - Kaush Arha and Peter Middlebrook, "Finish the Job: Jump-Start Afghanistan's Economy", *SILK ROAD PAPER* (2012): 29-32.

²⁴ - Muhammad Rizwanullah et al. "Role of CPEC in Enhancing Mutual Trust and Regional Integration Across OBOR Countries" (2020): 23.

Afghanistan has the ability to shape its strategic geopolitical position in order to start rebuilding its economy and contribute to the prosperity of the region. That just emphasizes how important it is for the nations in the area to put their affairs in order to achieve peace in Afghanistan, which is a prerequisite for realizing this potential. Afghanistan has always played a crucial role in world politics. Afghanistan, a key player in the New Great Game, has the potential to develop into a trading hub and a significant resource provider for the world economy provided that it is stabilized. Afghanistan's proximity to other countries has already made it an old hub for commercial networks and international transit. Its strategic claim to be the 'Heart of Asia' is strengthened by its borders with Iran in the west Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north; Pakistan in the south and east; and China in the far northeast.²⁵

A. *Khasanov* in 'Contemporary Conflict & Regional Security Study Laboratory' published in 2017, defines that the two South Asian nations will soon become members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. China has promised to invest \$46 billion in the Kashgar to Gwadar section of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, while India will contribute \$500 million to the Chabahar port in Iran. The Khorgos-Aktau (Caspian port) railway, the MoscowKazan high-speed train, and the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline are three examples of Chineseled infrastructure initiatives (between Turkmenistan and China). Line (D) of the Central AsiaChina Gas Pipeline, which has agreements with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, is in (d).(f) China-Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan Railway Khorgos Gateway (f) (development of a dry port on the Chinese-Kazakh border). The consolidation of states and greater economic integration within Asia are part of China's larger plan to develop the ports, roads, and rail networks throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This will significantly shorten the

²⁵ - Pashmina Mughal and Sadia Suleman "Global Geopolitical Dynamics and Prospects for Afghanistan's Regional Connectivity", *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* (2021)

time it takes for goods to travel from Asia to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The improvement of the relatively underdeveloped regions of southern and western China is another important goal. The Silk Road Economic Belt is a transcontinental and maritime component of OBOR (Maritime Silk Route). The majority of the transcontinental routes pass through regions and countries that have historically been under Russian control and where Russia hopes to establish a joint economic zone through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).²⁶

The crux of an article titled ‘Current Challenges to Central Asia and Afghanistan: Towards a Better World’ by Hekmatullah Azamy is that the geographic significance of Afghanistan for regional security and economic integration stems from its placement at the intersection of Central, South, and Southwest Asia. For the nation and its close and regional neighbors, its position may be a benefit or a disadvantage. Due to its long history of instability, Afghanistan has become a burden for the region, rather than an asset. Transnational terrorists, primarily Russian and Central Asian, are drawn towards Afghanistan because of the country's ongoing combat and use it as a base of operations for attacks throughout the area. The presence of these foreign jihadists in Afghanistan has grown significantly, and they have developed closer relationships with the local militants. Terrorists from Central Asia, in particular, help drug trafficking that starts in Afghanistan and ‘successfully’ passes through Central Asia on its way to Russia and Europe. They do not only pose a security threat to Afghanistan but also to their home nations.²⁷

²⁶ - A.Khasanov, “*CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS &/REGIONAL SECURITY STUDY LABORATORY*” UNIVERSITY OF WORLD ECONOMY & DIPLOMACY (UWED), TASHKENT – 2017.

²⁷ - Hekmatullah Azamy, Edited by Anna Gussarova “*Current Challenges to Central Asia and Afghanistan: Towards a Better World*”, CAISS (Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies), the Representation of the FriedrichEbertStiftung in Kazakhstan, 11 May 2016.

Syed Waqas Haider Bukhari, Prof. Dr. Naudir Bakht writes in 'Central Asia-Afghanistan Relations under the Shadows of Great Power Politics' that the region is currently experiencing extreme difficulty as a result of several conflicts and opposing interests. Despite their wealth, Central Asia and Afghanistan are politically unsound. Since gaining their independence, both have seen foreign interference upto varying degrees. They have a lot of similar principles, and any foreign involvement in Afghanistan disturbs the stability of Central Asia. Despite having distinct boundaries, people from both nations are united by their similar religious beliefs²⁸.

Research Gap:

There is a lot of work published on Afghanistan, its national character, its failed politics and economic system, foreign invasions, Talibanization, and social and ethnic problems but there is very limited focus and literature available to look at Afghanistan from a different lens of its positive role towards development and connectivity.

Conceptual Framework:

Underlying theory gives us a direction that helps to analyze and understand the issues in a better way and to provide a starting point for every research. This research work is structured around a combination of a few related concepts including geopolitics, geo-economics and neofunctionalism. This research thesis focuses on examining the case of Afghanistan as a regional actor that could not play its active role throughout the centuries. Similarly, enhancing the argument for the opportunities and prospects for Afghanistan, it highlights that Afghanistan has all the potential of economic and natural resources, most particularly the energy resources as defined by the geo-economics scholarship that argues that the State's economic potential influences its foreign policy and diplomatic posture. On the other hand, geopolitical scholarship

²⁸ - Syed Waqas Haider Bukhari, Prof. Dr. Naudir Bakht, "Central Asia -Afghanistan Relations under the Shadows of Great Powers Politics", Article in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2013).

argues that the geographical location of a state is a powerful tool for its effective and influential policy formulation and its execution. Fortunately, Afghanistan qualifies both in the geopolitical and geoeconomics sphere.

Geo-economics: The concept of geo-economics was introduced for the first time by Edward Nicolae Luttwak, who was an American military strategy-maker. Edward Luttwak coined the phrase "geo-economics" in 1990. It is a subfield of knowledge within classical geopolitics that emphasizes the use of economic material to increase and describe national interest and generate a good geopolitical outcome and effect other nation's economic and geopolitical interests.²⁹

Landlocked and rich in mineral resources, Afghanistan has been a vital trans-boundary trade corridor since the days of the ancient Silk Road. In contemporary times, its geographical significance as a trade partner has increased manifold since new neighbors come into existence after dissolution of the USSR, South and Central Asian economies intertwined, and collaboration and access to each other's natural resources became imperative to boost economic growth. Afghanistan has undertaken multiple multibillion-dollar cross-border energy, connectivity, and infrastructure projects, while also establishing itself as a transit route between the Central Asia energy producers and South Asia energy consumers. The earnest efforts made by Afghanistan to become a dominant player in the politics and economy of the regions is a positive step, since regional cooperation is the most effective method that can be implemented to accomplish its needs. Multilateral energy projects have the potential to help it overcome its power deficiency while serving as an energy corridor between south and central Asia. This

²⁹ - Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, 20.

arrangement has economic benefits for all the countries involved. Ambitious connectivity projects that include the Lapis Lazuli, INSTC, and BRI corridors will aid Afghanistan reach new international markets while proving to be a reliable transit route with direct access to the Indian Ocean via Iran Chabahar ports.

Similarly, the important mega economic infrastructures in the region include the geoeconomic framework of regional and global forces in these two parts of the globe especially Central Asia and Afghanistan.³⁰ It is also worth mentioning that Afghanistan keeps a significant amount of not only hidden natural resources but also a natural energy transit route. The geographical location of Afghanistan makes it a corridor for future energy transportation and can act as a transit point for importing Central Asian natural resources via southward to the Indian mainland. The Caspian Sea and Central Asian republics have abundant natural resources that can be used by South Asia to meet its expanding energy and consumption needs.

Geopolitics: The theory of geopolitics is linked to the geographical significance of state. It explains the behaviors and foreign policy of a state through its geographical elements including, location, resources, minerals, climate, linkages etc. The phrase geopolitics has had numerous meanings since its origin in 1899. It is divided into two areas, ‘geo’ and ‘politics’, which are at the heart of the concept. To begin with, the term ‘geo’ can apply to a wide range of geographical terms, including space, soil, and land. It can also discuss specific geographic factors, such as the number of natural resources in a particular geographic location. There is always discussion about whether geography should be regarded as a static or dynamic feature. Furthermore, the term ‘politics’ refers to all facets of power, including military strategy,

³⁰ - Imran Khan And Safdar Ali Shirazi, “Geostrategic Importance Of Afghanistan For Pakistan”, *Pakistan Geographical Review*, 76 no. 1, (2021):148.

international relations, and foreign policy. Geopolitics refers to the inextricable relationship between geography, economy and foreign policy.

The geopolitical theory comprises mainly of two dimensions: the sea power and the land power, widely known as the 'Rimland' and the 'Heartland' theory.³¹ The rimland contains the heartland. The Rimland theory mainly focuses upon the maritime significance and potential of a state's geographical location. Introduced by Nicholas J. Spykman, this theory illustrates that the sea power of a state is of equally potentiality as the land power. However, being landlocked Afghanistan falls more into the heartland concept through regional connectivity and joining projects.

Theory of heartland: H.J. Mackinder proposed this theory in 1904. In his essay, 'geographical pivot of history', he opines, 'who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the world island, and who rules the world island commands the world'.

The question here is why is Heartland essential according to him. The answer lies in the protected nature of the Heartland. Historically, different empires spread through their maritime power. Heartland's strategic location is ideal for controlling the entire world. Mackinder analyzes the geo-politics in term of location, accessibility, and natural resource base. Mackinder concluded that on the global scale, the earth surface consisted of a huge & continuous landmass (Europe, Asia, and Africa) and some isolated Islands.³² Previously, many people thought world conquest would come through sea power, but this theory proposes that land power can lead to world power. Mackinder thought that after gaining control of the Heartland and all its resources,

³¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Problem Of Asia And The Effects Upon International Politics* (Washington And London: Kennikat Press, 1920) 26-27.

³² - Mackinder, H. J. "The Geographical Pivot of History" *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1962) 241.

one could easily gain the World Island by controlling the coasts and warm water ports, or the key areas that made international trade possible.³³

Afghanistan's special geographical location plays an important role in defining the geopolitics of the region and has been referred to by terms such as 'Asia crossroads' or 'Heartland Asia'. Helford Mackinder believed that there are points that countries try to control on every continent and think of dominating it as equivalent to dominating the heart of the center of that continent. Afghanistan is also one of those countries that various empires have tried to dominate. Afghanistan is a landlocked country whose northern, southern, eastern, and western regions are separated by the Hindu Kush Mountains. The geopolitics of the region for Afghanistan is hinged to the geopolitical condition of the surrounding regions especially Southern and Eastern Asia, Central and West Asia, China, and the Middle East via Iran and vice versa.³⁴

In the emerging geopolitical dimensions, significant efforts are being made to improve connectivity throughout the regions, such as the 'Lapis Lazuli corridor', which would travel through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey to connect Afghanistan and Europe. As part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will be helpful for Afghanistan Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan can also use Afghanistan to travel through Central Asia to reach Europe. The regional connectivity project among the participating nations through Afghanistan will help the Afghan economy and provide more opportunities for the neighboring countries. In addition, neighboring nations will be able to

³³ - Priya Gunjan, *Importance of Afghanistan in Inner Asian Geopolitics*, Research Scholar, Center for Inner Asian Studies, School of International Studies Jawaharlal Nehru University, June 2014.

³⁴ - Abdul Hakim Erfan, "The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis", *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS)* ISSN: 2663-7197 DOI: 10.32996/jhss Journal Homepage: www.alkindipublisher.com/index.php/jhss.

conduct commerce through less expensive land routes than current air routes. South Asian countries will gain access to the Central Asian markets.

Neo-Functionalism: Neo-functionalism is the theory that relates to the notion of integration of European Union. The theory introduced by Ernest B. Haas in 1958.³⁵ Later on, globalization incorporated the concept of neo-functionalism with the latest integration of globalization discourse. It contains three main arguments: (i) increased economic interdependence between states; (ii) organizational capacity for conflict resolution through establishing international regimes/institutions; (iii) Market's rules and regulations that supersede state's rules. This theory conceptualizes that enhanced economic interdependence undermines the traditional concept of state's sovereignty and creates a high supranational environment for all the stakeholders for welfare objectives. This will enhance cooperation and facilitate harmony to reduce disputes among states creating a conducive environment for integration and development. In the case of Afghanistan, connectivity with other regions will have a positive spillover effect to control violence and terrorism. The regional integration of Afghanistan has the potential to emphasize the stakeholders (through energy, connectivity and transit projects) to help the country resolve its long-standing disputes.

Research Methodology:

This research is qualitative and explanatory. It is based on secondary data sources. The data collected from different secondary sources like books, articles, journals, online websites, and newspapers is consulted. The data analysis mechanism is used to interpret historical evidence of various powers on the land of Afghanistan, the current US invasion of Afghanistan for almost 20 has the ability to shape its strategic geopolitical position in order to start rebuilding

³⁵ Haas Ernst, *The obsolescence of regional integration theory* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California. ISBN 9780877251255.)

its economy and contribute to the prosperity of the region. That just emphasizes how important it is for the nations in the area to put their affairs in order to achieve peace in Afghanistan, which is a prerequisite for realizing this potential. Afghanistan has always played a crucial role in world politics. Afghanistan, a key player in the New Great Game, has the potential to develop into a trading hub and a significant resource provider for the world economy provided that it is stabilized. Afghanistan's proximity to other countries has already made it an old hub for commercial networks and international transit. Its strategic claim to be the 'Heart of Asia' is strengthened by its borders with Iran in the west Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north; Pakistan in the south and east; and China in the far northeast.³⁶ years and the future emerging scenario of China and Russia to focus on Afghanistan for their connectivity projects.

Significance of the Study:

This research highlights the geographical significance of Afghanistan with its untapped mineral resources and viable position to be utilized for the corridors. It elucidates persistent challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan's position in terms of connectivity within the region. This research also sheds light on ongoing issues and possibilities for Afghanistan's participation in regional integration. Not only is Afghanistan's location advantageous for the country, but it also offers the most convenient and direct route to other relevant areas. Afghanistan seems to play an essential role in politics and international relations via regional and international security and the economy. Afghanistan can facilitate better economic cooperation, infrastructure development, prosperity, and regional integration.

³⁶ - Pashmina Mughal and Sadia Suleman "Global Geopolitical Dynamics and Prospects for Afghanistan's Regional Connectivity", *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* (2021)

Delimitation:

This research focuses only on regional integration and Afghanistan's position and role in regional integration and elucidates; the ongoing prospects and challenges for regional connectivity.

Organization of the study:

This research aims to highlight the importance of regional connectivity and the role of Afghanistan for it. It also describes ongoing regional projects like the construction of railways, energy corridors, and roads through Afghanistan to boost overall regional trade and integration. Afghanistan, therefore, has a lot of potential to promote regional economic integration and growth. The research work is divided into the following parts:

Chapter-1: The Geo-economic and Geopolitical Significance of Afghanistan: A Historical Overview

The chapter gives an overview of the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan in the area. It also emphasizes the history of the nation from ancient times to the present. 328 years before Christ, Afghanistan served as a natural route for traders and conquerors who transported people and goods from West to East, between the Middle East and India, as well as the opposite. A thorough background on Afghanistan's place in the area is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter-2: Changing Global and Regional Dynamics and the Regional Connectivity of Afghanistan

Chapter two focuses on the changing scenario of contemporary world politics and the reemergence of regional and world orders from the perspective of examining Afghanistan's character. Afghanistan is located at the crossroad of trades and transportations and its geopolitical location always made it appealing for outsiders. The current political situation also

emphasizes the significance for Afghanistan of strengthening its ties with neighboring nations as part of a greater integration effort in order to address the economic development, security, and political issues the country is currently facing. The stability and development of Afghanistan, on the one hand, and the entire region, on the other hand, is greatly impacted by the wider regional approach to Afghan development, which is expected to contribute to the security of its own nation as well as those of neighboring nations.

Chapter-3: Challenges to Afghanistan's Regional Role

This chapter deals with the challenges for Afghanistan to play its role in the regional connectivity. Afghanistan faces a multitude of challenges, most of which are related to political instability, stagnant economy, security issues such as ethnic conflicts and insurgencies in border regions; civil war; gaps in the stages of intra-regional economic integration under the various regional agreements; and the existence of sectors and regions that are negatively impacted by greater integration and trade liberalization, necessitating compensatory mechanisms. The chapter elucidates both internal and external challenges to Afghanistan.

Chapter-4: Prospects for Afghanistan's Regional Connectivity

Chapter four highlights the prospects and an array of options for Afghanistan that can help improve its character and role in the region. Afghanistan has many opportunities to realize its potential as a 'land bridge' especially in the current geopolitical circumstances, which promotes regional integration and harmony. Peace and prosperity need to be a priority to maintain in Afghanistan to benefit from current regional settings. If the nation is able to overcome its difficulties, it will open up a wide range of economic opportunities for both Afghanistan and the surrounding region. As a result, Afghanistan now has a huge opportunity to

collaborate with its neighbors on institutional and policy frameworks that will enable it to turn this potential into actual regional projects.

Conclusion: In the end, the thesis presents a conclusion of the research and also elaborates on findings as well as giving practical recommendation

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF AFGHANISTAN: GEOPOLITICAL AND GEO-ECONOMICS PERSPECTIVE

Afghanistan and Regional Connectivity: Brief History

Connecting Central Asia with South Asia is crucial for the discovery of new markets and connecting them via the quickest, most effective, and secure ways now that economies in the region are quickly rising and increasing.³⁷ Since the days of the old Silk Road, transportation networks are emblematic of the necessary role of Central Asia as a connecting hub.³⁸ Since the days of the historic Silk Road, Afghanistan has been a very important trans-boundary commerce route due to its landlocked location and natural wealth. Since the fall of the USSR, new neighbors have emerged, growing Afghanistan's geographical relevance as a buying and selling partner. The topic of Afghanistan's geo-economic is necessary to understand because of its location like a trade way amongst Asian neighbors and also because of the region's significant natural resources, which help their codependent economies sustain.³⁹

Afghanistan, which signifies 'the Land of Afghans', does not have any ocean touching its borders, and is located in south Asia .The history of Afghanistan is at least 5000 years old, with historical and archaeological evidence pointing out the inclusion of Afghanistan among the most historical civilizations. The role it has performed in the improvement of tradition and

³⁷ - DIRECTORATE-GENERAL OF INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS, *GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF AFGHANISTAN*, SPANISH INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES (IEEE), MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, APRIL 2011.

³⁸ - The journal of central Asian study, Chief Editor: Prof. G. N. Khaki, Centre of Central Asian Studies University of Kashmir Srinagar, J&K, India, Printed at Mehak Printing Press, New Delhi, India, Year: 2014, P: 9

³⁹ - Zarghona Totakhail, "A Study of the Geo-economics of Afghanistan with its Central and South Asian Neighbors", *Kabul Education University, IJARIE-ISSN(O)-2395-4396*, p: 835

human thinking is quite documented.⁴⁰ Afghanistan's location has, throughout history, acted as a Bridge for Several empires, who made use of Afghanistan's geographic and geo-economics' region to send capital, culture, troops, thoughts and perpetuated the tradition of trade between East Asia, Europe and through South Asia and the West all. It was once Aryans' ancestral homeland.⁴¹ They provide privilege that the Aryans were a semi- nomadic race who named themselves Arya in their holy songs and came down to the northwestern plains through Afghanistan's mountains.⁴² The forebears of the Indo-European races prospered as a cultural hub at a time when Egypt and Babylon were allied. In Assyria, in the seventh and eighth century B.C., a large herd of tribes from Central Asia (in the northern phase of Afghanistan) is shown looking southwards. For a time, it was once regarded that the Aryans farmed fields, developed towns, settled down, and formed the groundwork for a primitive kind of independent state in which the people had a say in the authorities of their nation for the first time. Afghanistan, being in the middle of Asia, naturally grew to become an intersection of traveling peoples and the gathering area of excellent civilizations of the world, such as Aryans, GrecoBuddhists, and finally Muslims.⁴³ The Cimmerian tribes attacked Assyria with the help of the Kingdom of Van and other peoples. The Scythian hosts, the actual instigators of the fight, surged in behind them. The Bactrian Greeks, the Sakas, who expelled them, and the Kushans, who

⁴⁰ - THE JOURNAL OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES, Editor: Prof. G. N. Khaki, Publisher, Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Year: 2014.

⁴¹ - Aryan people: The people who composed them are known as the Vedic peoples and Indo-Aryans. They were not originally from India, and rather came as migrants travelling to the subcontinent via mountain passes located in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Aryans first settled in the Punjab, but then they pushed east along the Ganges, eventually impressing their way of life, language, and religious beliefs upon much of northern India. The course of India's history was completely changed during this period. By the end of the Vedic Age, numerous states had emerged and Hinduism and the *Varna* social system were beginning to take shape.(WORLD HISTORY Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500)

⁴² - Marianne KEPPENS, *The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste*, online. 9.

⁴³ - Amin, Hamiddullah, "The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan", *University of Durham*, online, (1967).

emigrated with the Sakas, all went to the southern parts of Hindu Kush. Similarly, it used to be a superb center of world trade and served as an entrepôt of thought and merchandise between the East and the West. Trade postulates a producer and a consumer, that is to say, a starting and an end, therefore, commercial interest preserves historical contacts.

Afghanistan's early civilization relied importantly on its advantageous location. The historical civilizations of China, India, Iran, Greece, and Rome all converged in this land.⁴⁴ The Tea-Horse Road (also recognized as the silk route of the south) used to be a setup of different animals, and human caravans that ran from southwest China to South Asia through the Afghanistan highlands.⁴⁵ The routes shaped on tribute rather than commercial enterprise commodities, although migration, trade, and planned military actions were also included. Silver, medicines, Salts, pelts, jewels, and some other things would finally travel through the Tea Horse Road, remodeling it into what some people denoted as a 'developer of economies'.

The routes considered to have begun their operations in the early Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), and a complicated community of routes had linked Yunnan to India, Nepal, Tibet, and central China through the 10th century CE. However, this cannot bypass the reality that trade routes between southwest China and South Asia existed for a long time. In the 2nd century BCE, ZhangQian observed bamboo canes and fabric from southwest China in a market in Balkh (modern Afghanistan), and instructed by people that merchants had received the commodities from India, indicating trade routes from southwest China to India and then to Central Asia.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ - Harmatta, János, Puri, B.N., Etemadi, G.F., *"History of civilizations of Central Asia: The Development of sedentary and nomadic civilizations in 700 B.C. to A.D. 250"*, Political Science (2010)

⁴⁵ - Training Handbook for Silk Road Heritage Guides, By Lewis , Viola, Newlands, Rosalind, UNESCO, World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, Wressnig, Felicitas.

⁴⁶ - Tim Williams, *The Silk Roads: an ICOMOS Thematic Study on behalf of ICOMOS, International Council of Monuments and Sites* 11 rue du Séminaire de Conflans, 94220 Charenton-le-Pont, FRANCE, 2014, p: 32

Afghanistan and China engaged in commerce and cultural exchange alongside Afghanistan's commercial enterprise highways.

Early Bactria, a fantastic town of Zoroaster referenced in the Zend Avesta, is stated to be hidden below the mountains and damaged walls that encircle a big enclave between Balkh and Mazari Sharif. Bactria (Balkh Old) City grew to become a central Asian caravan route hub. Later in recorded human history, one road led northeast to China, another southeast to India, a third southwest to Syria and the Mediterranean, and a fourth northwest to Bukhara, Samarkand, and other essential oasis cities like Meru and Khiva.⁴⁷

Herat lies on the crossroads of historical trans-Asian trade routes that link it with Balkh, India, Persia, and Central Asia. Like Bactria, Herat was once noted in the Avesta and was established the capital of the Achaemenes Satrapy of Aeria. It the seat of an Eastern Nestorian, Christian or bishopric in the sixth century B.C.E and after some time it grew to become an Urban diocese. Over the centuries, Herat has been the home of universal assaults and on many cases, it has been looted and its population defeated. Herat related with Iran as one of Khorasan's large cities, both politically and culturally.⁴⁸ It used to be essential for its agricultural output and its strategic region for national and worldwide trades⁴⁹. It helped as a crossroads between the cities and countries like China and Iranian plateau through the Central Asian silk roads.⁵⁰ Herat was additionally a necessary trading center for India. Transporting Goods from south of the Hindu Kush to Qandahar, from the place they had been transported to India. Herat

⁴⁷ - Ibid, p: 32

⁴⁸ - Jonathan L. Lee, *AFGHANISTAN A History from 1260 to the Present*, Published: by Reaktion Books Ltd, Unit 32, Waterside, 44-48 Wharf Road, London n1 7ux, uk, p: 26

⁴⁹ - Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan a cultural and political history* (Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, 2010) 49.

⁵⁰ - Ibid, p: 49

stated to be home to million people.⁵¹Huen Tsang writes that the cities are industrial facilities for people who are multi-lingual and multinational. To the north, the complex of matching ridges and arid valleys that lie between Pamir and Herat have naturally performed a unique role in the improvement of traffic between China and India. A link with Persia is located to the south and built-in the open sea route of the Persian Gulf, which also works for the Mesopotamian and Black Sea routes. The growth of the Greek dynasties in relation to the Indus, as well as their eventual exodus from the Oxus under Barbarian pressure, may additionally have performed a fundamental role in organizing these pathways for Indian commerce. The purpose was for the Chinese market to act as an easier conduit to the south for the West. Travelers from Central Asia aiming to access South Asia in historical times had two options: skip through Pakistan or ignore by way of Afghanistan.

While the Mountains of Himalaya close to the north and high mountains to the northeast prohibited huge quantity of overland trade, familiar cultural interactions and the movement of essential products still transpired. Through what is now Afghanistan, land routes via the Hindu Kush, more importantly, the Khyber by Pass, can grant connectivity between South Asia and Central Asia. Lapis lazuli is one of the major substances procured through these trade systems. As a particularly award-winning raw material in the historical world and used in mixture with silver and gold to create works of art, it is traded beside a route linking the people of Turkmenistan and the Indo-Iranian boundaries (currently, Afghanistan and parts associated to Pakistan) since at least the seventh millennium BC.⁵² Consequently, rich and populated cities

⁵¹ - Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan a cultural and political history* (Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, 2010) 49.

⁵² - Lord, Montague, *Regional Economic Integration in Central Asia and South Asia*, 15 May 2015, p.6 Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/66436/>

like Kapisa, Bamyan, Hadda, Balkh, Kabul and other sections of Afghanistan sprang up, and they grew to become facilitation centers of learning, trade, and craftsmanship that spread throughout Asia and Japan.

Afghanistan has been considerable since ancient times as the key to the conquest of India due to the fact of its topographic shape and natural geographic location, and because of the reality that it is bordered by water on three sides (west, east, and south). While the huge Himalayan Mountains and Qaraqorum surround it from the north. Afghanistan's sole possible choice was to invade the fabled Indian plains through its six historical thoroughfares (Chitral, Karam, Brughil, Khyber, Gomei, and Bolan). Napoleon Bonaparte, a Frenchman, was the remaining cosmopolitan to try to use the geopolitical situation in Afghanistan to force the British out of India. However, his plot foiled in 1799 when Shah Abd al-Abdali son of Timur Shah Abdali was overthrown. Afghanistan received strategic importance after 1801 AD due to the fact it served as a route to the Russian Empire's warm seas. During the identical time, Russia developed its railway community to the Central Asia, establishing a couple of channels that ran near to or all the way to Afghanistan's northern frontier. For example, the railway between Stalinabad and Bokhara. Because each of the Russian and British railroads were constructed for geopolitical purposes, every country closely watched the effect of the other in Afghanistan. As a result, none of them were capable of constructing railroads throughout Afghanistan.⁵³

Having a population of nearly 1.7 billion people, South Asia is a well-known potential market for commodities and products produced in many of the region's countries. In addition, India's rapid economic growth has piqued the interest of energy-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs) searching for a market for their exports. Alongside, Central Asia is recognized as a

⁵³ - Amin, Hamidullah, *The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan*, university of Durham, online, (1967), p: 73

possible market for South Asian's goods, each CARs and South Asia recognize each other as potential markets for their considerable energy resources and other products.⁵⁴ It is supposed that linking South and Central Asia is essential for the region's growth. The Karachi-TorkhamAqina route is no longer the only region which is going to join South Asia with Central Asia, thus, growing transit profits for each region and boosting the nations' geo-economics and geostrategic importance. At the same time, the Wagah-Peshawar Torkham route, whose distance is around 800 kilometres and connects India and Central Asia through Afghanistan, is probably the shortest potential route between India and Central Asia, decreasing the logistical prices of delivering commodities from India to Afghanistan and other countries.

Unfortunately, none of these routes are now utilized to connect India with central Asian Republics (CAR), since Pakistan is not completely satisfied about losing its part of the Afghan and Central Asian markets.⁵⁵

1.1 Afghanistan and Geo-economics:

American army strategist Edward Nicolae Luttwak first used the term “geo-economics” even though the concept of geo-economics only grew to be famous after the Cold War.⁵⁶ It describes the use of financial equipment to strengthen and safeguard both national and international interests, as well as their effects on the economies of other countries and a nation's geopolitical goals (controlling trade routes, getting access to herbal resources, and winning markets have all been fundamental issues).⁵⁷ On the other hand, geo-economics is an

⁵⁴ - Mohammdi Qais, Chabahr-Chabahr, *The decay of Afghanistan's geo-strategic and geo-economic location*, (2019) 3.

⁵⁵ - Ibid, p: 3.

⁵⁶ - Vusal Gasimli, *Geo-Economics, Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, (2010) 11

⁵⁷ - This brief was prepared by Prof Jane Golley (ANU Australian Centre for China in the World — CIW), Ms Yun

interdisciplinary field that considers geopolitical factors, economic intelligence, strategic analysis, and foresight, with the aim of supporting states and businesses in creating and implementing advantageous techniques to, amongst different things, defeat markets and shield key home economic sectors. Because of the interdependence between the two ideas, geo-economics appears at how a country arises and wields energy from an economic standpoint rather than simply a geographical one.

Afghanistan's struggle to assume a dominant role in the geo-economics of the location by involving its neighbors is a suitable step because regional cooperation is the most sensible technique for addressing its needs.⁵⁸ Thanks to multilateral power initiatives, it has the potential to help Central Asia overcome its electrical energy shortages and act as an energy corridor to South Asia. This settlement will advantage all the concerned countries economically particularly, Afghanistan. Ambitious connectivity initiatives like the Lapis Lazuli, Chabahar, and BRI corridors would facilitate Afghanistan's access to new international markets and act as a protected transit route. Afghanistan wants to make the most of the use of railroads for trade.⁵⁹ It is also essential to notice that Afghanistan maintains huge quantity of hidden natural resources and a natural energy transit route.⁶⁰ The Caspian Sea passes via Afghanistan due to its geographic

Jiang (CIW), Dr Darren Lim (ANU School of Politics and International Relations) and Prof Anthea Roberts (ANU

⁵⁸ - Masood Aziz, *Afghanistan: The Geopolitics Of Regional Economic Integration* The Emergence Of China As The New Facilitator, Norwegian Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, Norwegian Peacebuilding Research Center, September 2012.

⁵⁹ - Zarghona Totakhail, *A Study Of The Geo-Economics Of Afghanistan With Its Central And South Asian Neighbors*, Kabul Education University, Vol-6 Issue-4 2020 *Ijariie-Issn(O)-2395-4396* , 12356 www.ijariie.com 835.

⁶⁰ - Aamir Khan, Dr. Minhas Majeed Khan, *Geopolitical And Geo-Economic Study Of India And Pakistan's Interests In Post 9/11 Afghanistan*, *Pjaaa*, 18(8) (2021), Department Of International Relations, University Of Peshawar, P: 3842

region and the Central Asian republics have a wealth of natural resources that the South Asia could use to meet its developing power and consumption needs.⁶¹

1.2 Theory of Geopolitics and Afghanistan

Since the term was first used in 1899, the definition of ‘geopolitics’ has passed through massive change. Geopolitics is a wide concept that encompasses the interaction between geography, power, and politics. As a result, the study of reciprocal relationships in geography is known as geopolitics.⁶² Geopolitics is a contentious and indistinct idea. The wide definition states that it examines how geography influences politics, focusing primarily on the distribution and workout of power as well as geographical elements, specifically space, location, and distance.⁶³ Geopolitics is a discipline that emphasizes the interaction between territory, place, and the surroundings on the one hand, and politics and energy on the other.⁶⁴ Geopolitics is a contentious and vague idea. The broad definition states that it examines how geography affects politics, focusing specifically on the distribution and exercise of power as properly as geographical elements. The availability of natural sources within a described region is one example of the significance of the particular geographic elements. From a distinct perspective, Colin Gray, a member of the National Strategy Information Center of America and the writer of ‘The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era’ in 1977, states in his book that “security is geopolitics.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ - Ibid

⁶² - Mohammad Reza HAFEZNIA, A new Definition of Geopolitics, The Iranian Geopolitical Perspectives, Anul V, nr. 22 (2 / 2007)

⁶³ - Agnieszka Legucka Polish Institute of International Affairs, New Geopolitics - What is actually "New"? The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies 2013, No. 2 (4) ISSN 2299-4335, Article. January 2013.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261178049_New_Geopolitics_-_What_is_actually_New

⁶⁴ - Stefano Guzzini, eds. *The return of geopolitics in Europe? Social mechanisms and foreign policy identity crises.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

⁶⁵ - Ibid, p: 21

The special geographic region of Afghanistan, which is referred to as 'Heartland Asia' or 'Asia Crossroads', is huge in defining the geopolitics of the area. According to Helford Mackinder, countries try to control certain areas of every continent because they discover that doing so will provide them control over the continent's heart. Various empires have tried to rule over Afghanistan as well. Afghanistan is a landlocked country with awesome northern, southern, eastern, and western areas that are divided via the Hindu Kush Mountains.⁶⁶ According to René Grosset, Afghanistan is the 'ever-moving web page of Asian destiny' and has a rich record for a variety of reasons, inclusive of geopolitics, geography, climate, culture, and politics.

The political and military value of Afghanistan these days is clear from the distant past in the records of the area, and a good-sized element of this magnitude can be determined in its geographical make-up and strategic location. It is situated in South Asia at the intersection of the Asian geopolitical buildings (including China, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, the Indian subcontinent, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East). From a geopolitical perspective, Afghanistan and Iran are comparable to the steps of a gateway to Central Asia.⁶⁷ Afghanistan is the sole nation in the world whose geopolitical status has been long in the limelight. Along with Iran, Pakistan, and India, American geopoliticians see it as a continuation of Rimland. Under the notorious secret treaty (1915), it was considered as a strategic area of activity for the United States, Britain, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a whole, whilst Afghanistan'

⁶⁶ - Abdul Hakim Erfan, "The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis", *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* (JHSSS) ISSN: 2663-7197 DOI: 10.32996/jhss Journal Homepage: www.alkindipublisher.com/index.php/jhss.

⁶⁷ - Ibid

former Soviet geopoliticians saw it as a continuation of the Central Asian heartland structure and a standard Russian strategic area.⁶⁸

1.3 Afghanistan's Geopolitical Dynamics and the Major Power:

Afghanistan is regarded as a source of warfare between some world's powerful countries, such as the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and United States due to its essential geographical characteristics. Afghanistan has constantly been the focal factor of the USSR and British India, serving as a shock absorber country between the two competing governments' excellent games. When Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union, America was capable to stop the Soviet Union at the border between Pak and Afghan with the super support of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹ After the September 11 attacks, the international conflict on terror started, making Afghanistan a greater subject of interest. The independence of mineral-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs) is a supply of activity for such regional neighbors and big powers in the post-Cold War era. Afghanistan serves as a transit point for oil and gas and shares a direct border with the Central Asian Republic (CAR). Due to its rich herbal resources and geographical situation, Afghanistan has superb opportunities to be a self-sufficient economic center. However, chronic battle and instability induced through other countries for their very own advantages influence and US aggressiveness reduced the difficult.⁷⁰ The departure of NATO and the United States from Afghanistan ignited an established alarm in the region and beyond. Due to geopolitical fighting between the country's threatening neighbors and global powers' interests, Afghanistan's security became more and more challenging. The geopolitics route of the gas

⁶⁸ - Atai, F. and Jafari, M. M. "Geopolitical Developments and Afghanistan's Foreign Policy: 1919-2001". *Central Eurasia Studies* (2019) p. 44, 45

⁶⁹ - Muhammad Imran, Dr. Ghulam Mustafa and one other, Geopolitical Dynamics of Afghanistan and Concerns of Regional and Global Actors vis a vis Pakistan, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, September 2020, p: 793

⁷⁰ - *Ibid*, p: 793

transit between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan, for example, is a considerable trouble for Iran and Russia; both of them seek to limit US power in the particular region. At the same, Pakistan and India are worried about the situation in Afghanistan due to regional competition.⁷¹

1.4 An Overview of Afghanistan as a Transit Route :

1.4.1 Alexander Empire: (336B.C-323B.C)

The Great Alexander arrived in the Hindu Kush (currently recognized as a province of Afghanistan) in 329 B.C. The Macedonian army chief selected the long, moderate slopes of Ghazni, through the watershed into the valley of the Kabul River, and spent the winter in the KohiDaman valley north of Kabul, where Alexander the Great observed a historical city, Alexandria under the Caucasus, both in or near Kapisa province (currently known as Begram) overlooking the Ghor. Alexander the Great, who lived 328 years earlier than Christ, selected this option. Afghanistan is regarded plenty greater than a passageway; it is a crossroads of Asian trade lines.⁷²

Alexander the Great travelled through the pass known as Khawak Pass in the spring of 328 B.C. to defeat and populate the Oxus Valley's lush regions. In 327 B.C., he returned to the southern of the Himalayas and marched in the direction of the Kabul River and India, trying to cross the place of Pakhtun Khwa, now recognized as the modern Pakistan boundary between the Panjkora and Kunar rivers in some parts of Chitral, and was considered as one of the first superb rulers of whom we have record. Alexander the Great's dominance over Afghanistan is one of the most significant occasions in the country's history. For the first time, Greek philosophy, mythology, and art were introduced to the country, and Alexander

⁷¹ - Ibid, p: 793

⁷² - DIRECTORATE-GENERAL OF INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS, *GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF AFGHANISTAN*, SPANISH INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES (IEEE), MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, APRIL 2011

established trade and other relations with Afghanistan that lasted long after his death.⁷³ Alexander left the core of a colonial empire in his wake.⁷⁴ Following his conquest of these regions, Alexander established a Greek monarchy in what is now northwestern India, leaving at the back of the core of a colonial empire. This kingdom, recognized as Bactria, persevered with varying fortunes until well earlier than the beginning of the Christian period, making it the ultimate self-directed Hellenistic monarchy. It remained under massive Roman-Hellenistic impact until 751 A.D., when it was passed on to the Muslims. For centuries, the change routes have been dominated by these countries and the change routes that related China, India and the Mediterranean with Japan.

As the eastern terminus, the Bactrian and Kushan states eliminated intermediaries, facilitated trade, and positioned Hellenistic duration cultural traits at the heart of trading posts. One of his generals took over this territory, as well as the Japanese 1/2 of his Empire. The Seleucids seized authority when Alexander died (323 B.C.). Despite dropping the Indian sections of his new realm to an Indian prince named Chandragupta,⁷⁵ who had beforehand served for the Persians and Alexander the Great, the Seleucid family that he formed retained control of the land north of the Hindu Kush until much later.⁷⁶ The Maurya dynasty also remained tremendous but short-lived. Trade roads between Kapisa in Afghanistan to Taxila in Pakistan's Punjab region and then to Oasis City of Merv alongside the Silk Road in Turkmenistan amplified the importance of links with Central Asia beneath the Maurya Empire (322 - 185 BC). Takshashila (Currently recognized as Taxila in Pakistan) grew to become a very

⁷³ - Martin, McCauley, *Afghanistan And Central Asia A Modern History* (British Library, 2002) 4.

⁷⁴ - Ibid

⁷⁵ - Amin, Hamiddullah, "The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan", university of Durham, online, (1967), p: 9 ⁷² - Ibid, P: 10

⁷⁶ - Ibid, p: 10

essential crossroads for three trade routes during this time, one of these three leading north to Balkh northern Afghanistan.⁷⁷ During the early development of the Silk Road, Kushan Empire stretched out and firmly held the Inner Asian trade routes.

1.4.2 Silk Road (130 BCE-1453 CE)

The Silk Road was once a linkage of historical trade routes that linked the historical globe in doing their trade between 130 BCE and 1453 CE. It partly established by the Han Dynasty of China in 130 BCE. Because the Silk Road was once not a sole route from east to west, historians choose the term 'Silk Routes ,' to the time period 'Silk Road' is frequently used.⁷⁸ The fundamental role of the Silk Road throughout history was to inspire commerce, the transfer of creative ideas, as well as illnesses, and had increased impact on later human history.⁷⁹

At the mid of the sixth century, the Silk Road's significance was additionally made smaller when the Empire of Byzantine delivered silk worms to create and produce its personal silk.⁸⁰ The Silk Roads' effect on the endpoints, Europe and China, has frequently been exaggerated. However, it cannot be denied that the Silk Roads, in fact, performed a necessary role in altering communities all alongside their route. Goods and ideas were transported north south and east west and essential communications took place across the Tibetan plateau and

⁷⁷ - Lord, Montague, *Regional Economic Integration in Central Asia and South Asia*, 15 May 2015, p.7 Online at <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/66436/> MPRA Paper No. 66436, posted 03 Sep 2015 17:11 UTC ⁷⁴ - Mark, Joshua J. "Silk Road." *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified May 01, 2018. https://www.worldhistory.org/Silk_Road/.

⁷⁸ - Mark, Joshua J. "Silk Road." *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified May 01, 2018. https://www.worldhistory.org/Silk_Road/

⁷⁹ - Craig Benjamin, "Empires of Ancient Eurasia, The First Silk Roads Era, 100 BCE–250 CE", *University Printing House*, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom (2018) 14.

⁸⁰ - Amin, Hamiddullah, "The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan", *university of Durham*, online, (1967) 13.

across the Karakoram mountain ranges, High mountain passes, which join Xinjiang to modern-day northern Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bhutan. An essential part of the cultural interchange was the problematic ties between Central Asia and South Asia, which ran through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The much-discussed Buddhist monks' routes, so vital in the motion of ideas from South to East Asia, all used south-north paths that linked these two components of Asia, such as Central Asia to South Asia, and these were the essential factors of the Silk Roads, and it is critical that the complication of engagements is not over-simplified into an east-west negotiation.⁸¹

1.4.3 Kushan Empire (30AD–375 AD) and Commercial Activity

The excellent Empire of Kushan (30, 375 AD) delivered economic and political immovability to most of Central components of the Asia and increased its impact on the southern parts of Ganges Valley in Indian.⁸² The Kushans, who shaped an empire that spanned South Asia and Central Asia, banded collectively to manage a strategic area of the Silk Road. Originally nomads on the Eurasian steppe, Buddhism extended to China and other Asian countries through the Silk Road from the mid-first to mid-third centuries CE, when the Kushans managed the major trading route.⁸³ The documentary creators were merchants, monks, and other travelers who actively engaged in producing the documentary. Literary, epigraphic, and archaeological proof exhibit the formation of Buddhist monasteries from the 5th century BCE until the end of the first millennium CE. Trans-regional trade networks stretching from South

⁸¹ - Tim Williams, *The Silk Roads: an ICOMOS Thematic Study on behalf of ICOMOS, International Council of Monuments and Sites* 11 rue du Séminaire de Conflans, 94220 Charenton-le-Pont, FRANCE, 2014, p: 8

⁸² - Lord, Montague, *Regional Economic Integration in Central Asia and South Asia*, 15 May 2015, Online at https://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/66436/MPRA_Paper_No._66436, posted 03 Sep 2015 17:11 UTC.

⁸³ - Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*, Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further Oxford University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education, 2010, p: 42

Asia through the higher Indus extend into Central Asia's Silk Roads.⁸⁴ Silk Road trade had mounted connections from China to the Mediterranean Sea.⁸⁵

The Kushans began issuing coins that served as a symbol of their capability of authority and an aid to the trade. The Kushans' cosmopolitan outlook and their use of multicultural coins facilitated trade through their region.⁸⁶ This had access to sea routes connecting the ports of western India to ports in addition west that provided land portages to the Mediterranean and land routes passing via the Parthian Empire. The Kushan Empire's rulers prospered from commerce, and they, like its merchants, browsed for commodities from all around Eurasia. Archaeologists found a great treasure in the palace risen at Kapisi (now recognized as Begram), an Afghan city that functioned as the Kushan Rulers' summer capital.⁸⁷

India noticed skilled extra growth of the Kushan Empire and India became the only region for Kushans. Great art and intellectual undertakings took place under the umbrella of the first two Kushan empires. In order to allow the silk caravans from Peking to pass freely as they travelled through the Pamir Mountains to Balkh and then to India, they fought alongside a group known as the Parthians, using their Western electricity. In the north-east, they established a wonderful relationship with the great Han family of China. At their height, the Kushan rulers were expected to rank among the most ruthless autocrats of their time. The Kushan kings adopted Buddhism, and took over whatever remained of Greek-Indian culture. In the first century B.C., Greek as an official language had begun to disappear and was changed by Iranian

⁸⁴ - Tim Williams, *The Silk Roads: an ICOMOS Thematic Study on behalf of ICOMOS, International Council of Monuments and Sites* 11 rue du Séminaire de Conflans, 94220 Charenton-le-Pont, FRANCE, 2014, p: 49

⁸⁵ - Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*, Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further Oxford University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education, 2010, p: 47

⁸⁶ - Ibid, p: 47

⁸⁷ - Ibid, p: 49

tongues.⁸⁸ Particularly below Kanishka (who reigned around Ashoka), Buddhist temples were strongly settled in many areas of Afghanistan, turning it into a fundamental hub for Sakiamundi Buddha's religion. Afghanistan remained the country where Buddhism was strongest. Buddhism established superior roots in Afghanistan and Central Asia than in India itself up until the 900 A.D. The Indian traders, hundreds of whom had permanent abodes in Central Asia.⁸⁹ Observed the Buddhist monks. At its peak, the Kushan Empire protected the provinces of Bactria and Sogdiana, the Trim Basin, existing Afghanistan, the Punjab, the Indus Valley, and Sindh as far as Patna.⁹⁰

Numerous samples of bronze art with Roman or Alexandrian ancestry found at Bigram in the upper Kabul valley and in the top city sites of the northwest show close interaction with the Roman world in the first and second centuries A.D. because of the difficult conditions along trade routes and effective regimes in the decent. None of the Roman antiquities predates the second half of the first century A.D., so their importance cannot connected to the rise of Parthian dominance in India during the second and first centuries B.C. Roman bronzes and Syrian glass were popular among the ruling class in the first century A.D. The predominance of Sassanian moneys from the third century in the Kabul Valley and northern India is notable, indicating well-structured economies have an impact on governmental strength. The Sassanian Empire's increase notably diminished Kushan authority, main to the collapse of the Kushan Empire. The 'Great Kushan ruler', Vasudeva, passed away in 225 CE, only five years after the Han Dynasty in China. The Kushan Empire used to be in decline beginning in 225 CE, in spite of the fact that a

⁸⁸ - Amin, Hamidullah, *The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan*, university of Durham, online, (1967), p: 12

⁸⁹ - Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2010, Editor: Nirmala Joshi, *Reconnecting India and Central Asia Emerging Security and Economic Dimensions*, Printed in Singapore, p: 9

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p: 12

quantity of minor rulers who were only identified by their currency managed to preserve some measure of its greatness for a few following years. The latter Kushan emperors had to contend with Ardashir, the Sasanian conqueror who, quickly after being crowned in 224 CE, began to be the leader and led his soldiers into Kushan territory. He used to be a strong rising power in Central Asia. The Sasanian empire managed to develop after Ardashir's death in 242 CE thanks to his equally successful son Shapur I, and by 262 CE the Sasanian military had totally devastated the Kushan royal capitals of Begram and Taxila. A new Sasanian provincial country known as Kushanshar now consists of the northwest areas of the erstwhile Kushan Empire. In the late fourth century, it was in the end destroyed by means of the White Huns, or Hephthalites.⁹¹

1.5 The Rise of Islam and Afghanistan as a Trade Transit

Around the seventh century, with the increase of Islam in the seventh century, a new group of mediators between the Mediterranean, India, and China emerged. Arab Muslims launched a 100-year campaign to subjugate Afghan tribes and spread Islam after defeating the Sassanians in the Battle of Qadisiya in 637. This campaign started at the same time as the Tang Dynasty mounted in China at the starting of the seventh century. By the eleventh century, both the Central Asian Samanid Dynasty and the Arab Abbasid Dynasty had crumbled. The Samanids' offspring and first distinguished Islamic dynasty in Afghanistan was the Ghaznavids. In 1220, Central Asia was once captured through Genghis Khan's Mongol forces.

⁹¹ - Craig Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia, The First Silk Roads Era, 100 BCE–250 CE*, University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom, 2018, p: 245.

Until Timur established and expanded the Mongol Empire in the 1380s, Afghanistan remained divided. Afghanistan was dominated by Timur's successors up to the early sixteenth century.⁹² In the centuries that followed, during what may be stated a Second Silk Roads Period, essential Silk Roads connections along each land and maritime routes revived.⁹³ However, there is no uncertainty that the civilization of Islam used to be humanity's best success in the Medieval Era, and Afghanistan performed in an outstanding manner in the international spread of Islam as well as trade growth through Afghanistan.

1.5.1 Mongol Empire (1206-1368) and Trade Expansion through Afghanistan

Genghis Khan's Mongol invasion led to huge population deaths, the obliteration of a variety of cities, consisting of Ghazni, Herat, and Balkh, as well as the spoliation of fundamental agricultural regions.⁹⁴ In order to run their empire and, in particular, to build their capital on the steppe in what is now central Mongolia, the Mongol emperors under Genghis Khan hastily hired local traders, intellectuals, and businessmen following each conquest. As Mongol invaders promoted trade and cultural interactions over the Eurasian land routes, for nearly a century the Central Asian steppe served as a bridge once more between Europe and China. But all of that would alter as the marine commerce increased.⁹⁵ During China's Song Dynasty (960–1279), Genghis Khan was born.

China had a strong economy at the time, and a significant export enterprise was provided from abroad. Even though the availability of silk yarn and silk textiles in the backyard of China

⁹² - Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, Country Profile: Afghanistan, August 2008.

⁹³ Craig Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia*, The First Silk Roads Era, 100 BCE–250 CE, p: 238

⁹⁴ - Larry Wentz and Karen E. Black, Editors, *Analysis of an Intervention*, Lessons from US Advisory Work in Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector, Published for the Defense Information Systems Agency, by the National Defense University May 2017, p: 205.

⁹⁵ - Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*, Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further Oxford University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education, 2010, p: 109

was developing due to the circulation of manufacturing methods, they were still expensive exports. More spices and incense started being offered from the Arabian Peninsula as properly as Southeast and South Asia, and they were increasingly employed not just for ceremonies and cooking but additionally for their therapeutic effects. He continued by means of describing a extraordinary irrigation system that had six large canals at one time but only had three operating now Afghanistan.⁹⁶ Population boom in Eurasia and Africa because of agricultural development has also accelerated the need for both domestically produced items and imports.⁹³ Commercial activity accelerated quickly. They extended southward through the Indian subcontinent⁹⁷, Indochina and the Iranian plateau before extending northward from the Sea of Japan to Central Europe. Despite their unsuccessful attempts to invade India, the Mongols promoted commerce between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.⁹⁸

1.5.2 Mughal Empire: (1526 AD-1857AD) and Trade Expansion through Afghanistan

One of the dominant countries in the early period was the Mughal Empire. It progressively increased to cover virtually all of South Asia, from Afghanistan to India's southernmost tip and from the Indus River to Burma's boundaries. More than a quarter of the global economic output once produced with the aid of it. Success on the battlefield had a tremendous role in terms of both political and financial prosperity.⁹⁸ Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur based the Mogul Empire in 1504 and served as its governor from 1504 to 1747. He was born into Central Asian aristocracy.

⁹⁶ - Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan a cultural and political history*, Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, 2010, p: 22 ⁹³ - Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*, p: 109.

⁹⁷ - Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*, p: 109.

⁹⁸ - Lord, Montague, *Regional Economic Integration in Central Asia and South Asia*, 15 May 2015, p.6 Online at <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/66436/> MPRA Paper No. 66436, posted 03 Sep 2015 17:11 UTC ⁹⁸ - Andrew de la Garza, *The Mughal Empire at War Babur, Akbar and the Indian military revolution, 1500–1605*, First published: 2016, by Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN.

He was a direct descendant of the famed conquerors Timor and Chingiz Khan ⁹⁹ which distinguished his pedigree as being especially elevated. He held positions of power, fame, and honor due to a variety of factors throughout history. Later in life, he asserted that a new kingdom in Afghanistan based on the city of Kapisa, Kabul, some forty kilometres to the south.¹⁰⁰ Had climbed, overtaking it as the fundamental financial hub, through which the key trade strains from Central Asia went, and from which the essential strategic highways into India extended.¹⁰¹

Commercial and cultural members of the family with Central Asia developed during the Indian subcontinent's Mughal Empire (1526-1857), incredibly under Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627). Through the Khyber and Bolan passes, the most important caravan routes related Kashmir, Afghanistan, and the enormous place of Turkestan. Silk, animal fur suit, horses, dried and fresh fruits, falcons, cotton, and valuable metals have been the essential items produced in Central Asia; from India, tea, textiles, spices, natural plants, and valuable stones were procured. The Central Asian countries and India regularly exchanged diplomats to discuss commercial enterprise and business matters. The Moguls used the historical caravan routes through Afghanistan to attain Central Asia after Portugal captured essential trading ports in Goa, Diu, and Daman.

After Kazan and Astrakhan were taken by Russia in 1552 and 1556, commerce between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent still managed to grow. Since then, retailers from

⁹⁹ - Ibid, p: 31

¹⁰⁰ - Ibid, p: 32

¹⁰¹ - *Afghanistan Reconnected: Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014*, Report on the Abu Dhabi Process Consultations 2013-2014, May 2014, 32-33

Central Asia have performed a larger function in mediating commerce between India and Russia.¹⁰²

1.6 Modern Afghanistan (1747AD...CE)

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Pashtun Durrani Ahmad Shah rose to prominence and was topped king, organizing the current Afghan state. Additionally, he was in charge of Kashmir and Delhi. Peshawar served as his winter capital and Kandahar, the place he is buried, served as his summer capital.¹⁰³ The Empire of Durrani is credited with giving Afghanistan its modern appearance. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani mounted the Durrani Empire, which included Afghanistan, eastern Turkmenistan (which covered the Panjdeh Oasis), north-western India, and north-eastern Iran, the majority of Pakistan which covered the Kashmir region.¹⁰⁴

When Ahmad Shah Sadozai assumed the role of Badshah, or king, he was in his mid-20s, however neither he nor any member of the tribal council had any prior experience in managing a kingdom. Ahmad Shah's response was to take in and regulate Multan's Mughal government's policies as well as Safavid administrative practices. The absolutist Safavid structure of kingship additionally influenced Ahmad Shah's concept of monarchy. Since various conquerors from the Asian steppes, India, Arabia, Persia, Mongolia, and even China have reigned at a number of points in the region's history and contributed to the cultural and ethnic range of the nation, Afghanistan has been dubbed the Highway of Conquest. However,

¹⁰² -Ibid, p: 32

¹⁰³ - Martin, McCauley, Afghanistan and Central Asia A Modern History, British Library, 2002, 5 ¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁴ - The Journal Of Central Asian Studies, Editor: Prof. G. N. Khaki, Publisher, Centre Of Central Asian Studies, University Of Kashmir, Year: 2014, P: 2

Afghanistan would possibly also be referred to as the Highway of Commerce due to the fact the due to their location on what is incorrectly referred to as The Silk Road.

The majority of Afghanistan's fundamental cities and cities are significant. This term is misleading due to the fact there was by no means a single road that connected east and west, north and south, and the movement of items over giant distances was the result of several localized transactions, much like how goods are still bought and bought in weekly markets in the majority of Afghani provincial towns. Ahmad Shah as the hakim of Balkh additionally appointed Nawab Khan Alakozai, a Durrani Sardar. The hakim's fundamental duty was to act for Durrani interests in the Balkh, especially to tax and ensure the protection of qafilas touring between Bukhara and Herat and Between Bukhara and Kabul. Herat is located at the intersection of numerous historical trans-Asian trade routes that join it to Persia.¹⁰⁵

Ahmad Shah Durrani created the modern town of Kandahar in the 1750s, which accompanied the destruction of Old Kandahar through the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah Afshar in 1737. The fundamental town of this place and the former capital of the Durrani kingdom, Kandahar, is located between the Arghandab and its tributary, the Tarnak, and on the historical trade routes that linked Persia, Herat, and Central Asia with the Indus and Sind. Additionally, Kandahar has the advantage of being the closest Afghan city to Chaman, the Pakistani railhead, and Karachi, the port through which the majority of Afghanistan's imports and exports transit.¹⁰⁶ Since trade between Bukhara and India overland was fundamental to Kabul's economy, the most

¹⁰⁵ - THE JOURNAL OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES, Editor: Prof. G. N. Khaki, Publisher, Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Year: 2014 , p: 136

¹⁰⁶ - Jonathan L. Lee, *AFGHANISTAN A History from 1260 to the Present*, Published: by Reaktion Books Ltd, Unit 32, Waterside, 44–48 Wharf Road, London n1 7ux, uk, p: 116

important caravan route north from Kabul passed through Koh Daman and up to the Ghurband valley to Bamiyan.

The southern route passed through the present-day city of Maiden Shar to reach Jalrez and Behsud before crossing the Hajigak and Unai passes and coming collectively with the northern route to the east of Bamiyan in the shadow of the dismantled Kushan fortress of Shahr-i Zohak. These two pathways served as the essential entry factors as well. The ancient trade route to the Amu Darya relocated farther east only when the Soviet Union dug a tunnel through the mountains in the center of the twentieth century. At the time, the Salang Pass, which is now the essential road north, did not exist. Timur Shah formed agreements with Amirs who managed the Kabul Bamiyan-Balkh route, tribes that up until this factor had been independent and peripheral to the Durrani monarch's strategic interests, in order to protect the trade with Bukhara and prospective assault from the north. Because they controlled the de facto passage from Nangahar to the Koh Daman, Timur Shah additionally tried to win the assist of the Kohistan and Tagab populations. Timur Shah shaped a variety of great marital partnerships with these communities' leaders in order to bind them to the monarchy's objectives. He also increased effective religious leaders from these areas to positions of authority.¹⁰⁷

At the time, Kabul was a fundamental hub for commerce between Bukhara and the Indus, and the city's incomes, which usually generated from customs taxes, were extremely larger than those of Kandahar were. Numerous Jews, Armenians, and Hindu banyas who labored as brokers, bankers, and moneylenders also resided in the city.¹⁰⁸ These non-Muslims provided a essential credit service, not only for the mercantile community however also for the

¹⁰⁷ - Jonathan L. Lee, *AFGHANISTAN A History from 1260 to the Present*, p: 151

¹⁰⁸ - *Ibid*, p: 147

king, as Islamic regulation prevents Muslims from lending money at interest to other Muslims.¹⁰⁹

The Central Asian States are focusing on commerce with Afghanistan thru trade liberalization, which consists of reduced non-tariff trade barriers, expanded regulatory regimes, and a variety of initiatives aimed at ensuring the persevered movement of trading products, services, and people throughout borders. Both countries' economies are enhanced because of bilateral collaboration. Afghanistan was a fundamental geopolitical participant in both British India and Central Asia at the time. Both have abundant strength resources. Governments in Central Asia and Afghanistan should work to elevate the level of life for the accepted public through economic cooperation and foreign investment. When every member in the society is rich, they will actively contribute to the nation's progress.¹¹⁰

Afghanistan once more received strategic significance as a cushion country between Russia and Britain in the north and India in the south in the south throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The feudal dynamics strengthened during this time, and civil hostilities between various tribes lasted for a very long time.¹¹¹ With the growth of the Tsarist and British colonial empires in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, the location as a whole started to fragment. The last enduring direct historic link between Afghanistan and Central Asia used to be the Emirate of Bukhara; nevertheless, the profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes imposed through the Soviets in the location between 1917 and 1991 ended its

¹⁰⁹ - Ibid, p: 147

¹¹⁰ - Waqas Bukhari, *Central Asia-Afghanistan Relations under the Shadows of Great Powers Politics*, Lahore Garrison University, January 2013, p:13

¹¹¹ - Amin, Hamidullah, *The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan*, university of Durham, online, (1967).

resemblance to Afghanistan. However, communication between the two zones persisted. Tens of lots of people from Central Asia, specifically Turkmens and Uzbeks, escaped the civil conflict and Stalinist collectivization in the 1920s and 1930s and settled in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been significant since historical times as the key to the conquest of India because of its topographic structure and natural geographic location, and because of the reality that it is bordered by water on three aspects (west, east, and south). While the large Himalayan Mountains and Qaraqorum encompass it from the north. Afghanistan's sole doable choice was to invade the fabled Indian plains through its six historic thoroughfares (Chitral, Karam, Brughil, Khyber, Gomel, and Bolan). Napoleon Bonaparte, a Frenchman, was the final cosmopolitan to strive to use the geopolitical situation in Afghanistan to pressure the British out of India.

However, his plot foiled in 1799 when Shah Abd al-Abdali son of Timur Shah Abdali was overthrown. Afghanistan received strategic magnitude after 1801 AD because it served as a route to the Russian Empire's high seas. During the same time, Russia developed its railway network to Central Asia, developing a couple of channels that ran near to or all the way to Afghanistan's northern frontier. For example, the railway between Stalinabad and Bokhara because each the Russian and British railroads were constructed for geopolitical purposes, each country closely watched the impact of the different in Afghanistan. As a result, none of them have been capable to construct railroads throughout Afghanistan.

Two internal boundaries improved the already extreme external mobility scenario. Russia correctly solidified its rule over the Oxus border with the constructing of the Trans-Caspian Railway, which left Krasnovodsk in 1880 and reached in Samarkand in 1888. The institution of the railway link from Orenberg to Tashkand in 1905 significantly decreased the

distance between the Russian capital and this borderline. Along the HariRud, there are many sites of entry into northern Afghanistan from Soviet Turkistan, such as Termiz, 'Qizil- Qala (Shirkhan Bandar), and Zulfoqar, all of which have railway connections on the Soviet side of the river.

Two cities in Iran's east serve as entry factors to western Afghanistan. From Mashhad to Herat, there is a 420-kilometer-long motorway and a little longer route through the Zulfikar Mountains. These rails may also soon see extra traffic due to the fact of the Afghan-Iranian transit deal reached in the spring of 1962. A caravan route runs to Farah, which links through street to Herat, Girishk, and Kandahar, and is twenty kilometres from the incredible Helmand River and the Afghan border, coming out of Husratabad in Persian Seistan. By using this Frontier track as a superb education floor for the armies who had to patrol it, the British authorities made the most of it.¹¹²

Before India's 1947 Partition, Afghanistan believed that her most important routes to the outside world—the Khybar and Bolan passes—offered her the best trading possibilities and the Wealthiest opportunities to her moneylenders. These routes circumnavigate the rough eastern boundary zone—one on the north, the other on the south—and make simple highways accessible for access to the Afghan capital. Consequently, two routes connect Pakistan to Afghanistan. The traditional eastern approach to Afghanistan is through the Khybar pass from Pakistan's Peshawar alongside a modern road that connects to Kabul and Jalalabad. The Quetta-Kandahar Road is in the second region in terms of significance.

¹¹² - Amin, Hamidullah, *The role of communication in the development of Afghanistan*, university of Durham, online, (1967), p: 80

A transit settlement between Afghanistan and Pakistan was signed on May 29, 1958. The two nations' ties expanded because of this deal, which included Pakistan's promise to take away products in passage from neighborhood taxes and customs to Afghanistan. Afghanistan has additionally received extra facilities at Chaman, Peshawar, and Wagha, as nicely as specified sites and sheds for commodities being transported there from Karachi port.¹¹³ When Mohammad Daoud Khan appointed as prime minister of Afghanistan in 1953, the nation's relations with the Soviet Union started to improve. Moscow served as Kabul's fundamental trade partner and political ally for more than 20 years. It gave Afghanistan considerable army and political assistance, promoted infrastructure and industry development, and supported literacy programs, women's emancipation, and agrarian reform to foster social change.¹¹⁴

President Daoud Khan made an effort to loosen the Soviet hold on power after the 1973 coup in an effort to weaken the effect on Afghan communists. This led to a second coup in 1978, which was carried out through local communists who had fashioned a pro-Soviet government and requested help from Moscow. His geopolitical significance had been fantastic prior to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan but had diminished following the fall of the Soviet Union. Afghanistan's geopolitical prominence has therefore remained varied throughout time due to regional and global changes, and this transition has always remained in motion.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ -Ibid, p: 80

¹¹⁴ - Ibid, p: 90

¹¹⁵ - Erfan Abdul Hakim, *The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis*, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS), July 10, 2021, p: 39

CHAPTER TWO

CHANGING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY OF AFGHANISTAN

The shift of the global political center of gravity to Asia from the West occurred due to the key role of China in global politics as an emerging super power. Also, due to the tensions between the United States of America and China, the former one is one of the most powerful economies in the world while the latter is still leading and proceeding toward the skies by leaps and bounds. China's rise in the economic sector in particular is inexorably rebalancing the interests of regional and global players like India, Russia, the US, and Europe. Hence, a deep study regarding the region reveals that as the west has been facing bad economic situations since the 1930s, it has provided the world with a chance of multi-polarization.¹¹⁶

The issue of Afghanistan, which China, the US, and Russia all share, serves as common ground. Additionally, the aforementioned trilateral format is one of the most active and productive multilateral dialogue mechanisms on Afghanistan's issues, along with Pakistan. The aforementioned nations can pave the way through fruitful and multilateral dialogues for international cooperation and coordination with Afghanistan.¹¹⁷ Consequently, the role of the EU has become more significant in the view of the US policy in Afghanistan after the end of the war.

¹¹⁶ - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESEARCH CENTER, September 2012.

¹¹⁷ - Zhao Huasheng, *Changes in Afghanistan: Regional and International Implications*, [Articles](https://russiancouncil.ru/en/), Russian international affairs council, central Asia, December 8, 2021, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/>

Since last 20 years, the EU had been a particularly important role in donating to Afghanistan¹¹⁸. Apart from that, there is constant intervention in the politics and economy of Afghanistan by regional and international engagements between distant and near neighbors. The political and domestic unrest among the neighbors of Afghanistan along with external enemies' attacks, including domestic and political Unrest in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, a radicalized Pakistan, U.S military action against Iran, and tensions in between India and Pakistan could largely influence Afghanistan's political and economic situations.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the optimistic and positive behavior of the said power that includes regional and international powers can possibly lead Afghanistan on the right track both politically and economically.¹²⁰

However, the restoration of Afghan autonomy is the key issue to be resolved sooner or later. Additionally, the regional countries need to give attention to and assist Afghanistan in its reconstruction and rebuilding with new ideas and approaches. That is why the two powerful economies, China and Russia, are supposed to assume greater responsibilities on their parts in coordinating the regional countries not only for their personal interests but also for the interests of the region and even for the international community as well.¹²¹

While sharing common interests, there are specific interests of every local country, even many of them are contradictory as well, for instance; in case of India and Pakistan, there would be great geopolitical and geo economic implications for both the countries due to regime change

¹¹⁸ - Ibid

¹¹⁹ - Heather Conley, *Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia*, journal of center for strategic and international study (CSIS), January 2014.

¹²⁰ - Zhao Huasheng, Changes in Afghanistan: Regional and International Implications, [Articles](https://russiancouncil.ru/en/), Russian international affairs council, central Asia, December 8, 2021, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/>

¹²¹ - Ibid.

in Afghanistan. But, if the local counties or neighbors fail to cooperate and coordinate, it will cause clash between them along with complicated consequences for the Afghanistan issue.¹²²

In the political arena, it is necessary for Afghanistan to insist on implementing moderate religious policies, giving women's rights and freedom of speech, to cut off relations with terrorists, slowly shift its focus towards economic development and social construction, establishing new and good neighborly and bilateral relations with neighbors, alongside the construction of normal relationships with the international community by establishing an inclusive government in Afghanistan.¹²³

The above-discussed things are not only necessary for values and morality, but also are the needs of pragmatic politics, that can become the basis for Afghanistan to maintain and establish short and long-term political and economic stabilities along with establishing peace and harmony. Furthermore, in order to become self-reliant, Afghanistan needs to focus on pursuing its economic goals. Along with this, international assistance is much necessary for Afghanistan, particularly in the current situation, which can only provide her with emergency relief, not permanent solutions. As it is the matter of fact, the economy has not developed perfectly due to the constant financial aid of International Community almost for the past 20 years.¹²⁴

There is a need of development of trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan, including joint project construction and investment are the most significant ways of helping Afghan economy to become self-reliant. Thus, there is a need of creating corresponding conditions, domestic stability, basic security guarantees, feasible and practical alongside realistic

¹²² - Ibid

¹²³ - Zhao Huasheng, Changes in Afghanistan: Regional and International Implications, [Articles](#), Russian international affairs council, central Asia, December 8, 2021, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/>

¹²⁴ - Ibid

and accessible economic policies, favorable cooperation conditions and the best investment environment inside Afghanistan.¹²⁵

Subsequently, the regional countries and neighbors provided with a greater stake in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity due to the economic interdependencies that emerge in a regional open market system. Also, Afghanistan is landlocked with every country in the region and provides the alternative routes to international markets that includes road and train transportation projects.¹²⁶ Although, it is hard to believe that Afghanistan would prosper economically in a short time, but due to its geostrategic and geopolitical position along with rich natural resources and transit potential, it has its own economic potential and advantages to itself and the region. As, the situation becomes normal after withdrawal of the foreign troops, the regional countries would definitely invest and assist Afghanistan with good economic policies for their own and Afghanistan's interest due to its special geographical connection with central, south, and west Asia. Thus, by establishing roads connections, gas pipeline networks, and railway connections, a new trade corridor established. In addition, of course, Afghanistan will enjoy great benefits due to its hub and transit among the neighbors and will not only benefit Afghanistan but will benefit the whole region at all.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ - Ibid

¹²⁶ - Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, United States Institute of Peace, An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our website (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject. www.usip.org 124 ¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁷ - Ibid.

2.1 Afghanistan: A Significant Entity

The history of Afghanistan is rich enough for many reasons, that include geological, geopolitical, geo-economics, geostrategic, cultural, and climatic factors, and it is, in the words of Rene Grosset, Afghanistan's "ever-moving page of Asian destiny".¹²⁸ That is why Afghanistan's current political, economic, and military relevance is traced back to the near past in the history of the region, and its geographic position along with natural terrain played a vital role in this importance.¹²⁹ In addition to this, Afghanistan due to its geographic location remained one of the important countries in the world's history in general while in the regional history in particular. So, it has become a crucial part of the agendas of big powers. As it is connected with central, south, and west Asia at the same time, that is why Afghanistan is the only country in the world whose geopolitical standing is still being determined.

Moreover, it is not only seen as Rimland by the geopoliticians of Iran, Pakistan, and India but also by the America.¹³⁰ That was the reason it is considered as a strategic region by NATO, UK, and US as a whole under the umbrella of the most famous and important secret pact of 1915. While on the other hand, it is considered as a traditional strategic territory and Central Asian heartland by the former USSR's geopoliticians.¹³¹ Most importantly, Afghanistan is regarded as 'a source of geopolitical struggle in the Great Game' by Rudyard Kipling in one of

¹²⁸ - Abdul Hakim Erfan, *The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis*, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS) ISSN: 2663-7197 DOI:10.32996/jhsss Journal Homepage: www.alkindipublisher.com/index.php/jhsss.

¹²⁹ - Ibid, p:38

¹³⁰ - Atai, F., & Jafari, Geopolitical Developments and Afghanistan's Foreign Policy; 1919-2001. *Central Eurasia Studies*, M. M. (2019), p: 44, 45

¹³¹ - Abdul Hakim Erfan, *The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis*

his novels, 'Kim' over a century ago.¹³² In conclusion, Afghanistan has become much important to superpowers of their time due its geography. In addition, it has generated a competition among big powers for more influence in Afghanistan. As a result, it is continually attacked by big powers on different occasions, for example; during the cold war, rivalries between UK and USSR, as well as rivalries between the US and USSR triumphed over the opposing force. Since 9/11, there occurred change in the regional perspective and approaches to the country, due to shift in the importance of changed management of Afghanistan, all of which have changed its regional and global standing/position. It is necessary according to the superpower's perspective to consider Afghanistan's strategic location. Hence, alongside the region, the September 11 attack refocused the attention of great geopolitical actors throughout the world on Afghanistan.¹³³

2.2 Afghanistan and Regional Connectivity

Afghanistan is a landlocked country that believes a regional strategy would help it achieve its national goals. From 1919, when the country obtained full autonomy from the British Empire, until the communist takeover in 1978, Afghanistan was the target of direct influence from both regional and global powers.¹³⁴ Afghanistan is economically dependent on its neighbors because most of its trade is with countries in the region. The return of these refugees presents serious economic, social, and security challenges for the Afghan government. In addition, millions of Afghan refugees have sought refuge in Pakistan and Iran in recent decades.

¹³² - Iram Khalid, *The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)*,

Journal of South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Vol. 26, No. 2, July-December 2011, pp. 242

¹³³ - Abdul Hakim Erfan, *The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis*, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS), July 10, 2021, p: 39

¹³⁴ - Haroun Mir, *IS A REGIONAL STRATEGY VIABLE IN AFGHANISTAN?* CARENEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL FANE, Edit by: Ashley J. Tellis & Aroop Mukharji

While this is happening, many Afghan youth who have received an education in these nearby countries have the capacity to contribute to the reconstruction and advancement of their country.¹³⁵ Undoubtedly, Afghanistan has a number of difficulties in its attempts to bring about peace and security through regional discussions. However, a stable Afghanistan is better for the area as it can significantly contribute to regional prosperity through enhanced trade and transportation.

Afghanistan has the ability to play a significant role at the intersection of these regions because it is an essential part of South Asia, Central Asia and Far East as well as the Greater Middle east.¹³⁶ Forging new trade ties with the Indian subcontinent is crucial, since these ties largely remained frozen during the Soviet era and Afghanistan now offers significant economic potential for investors from its Central Asian neighbors.¹³⁷

2.3 Importance of Afghanistan for Central Asia

In comparison to other regions, the quality of infrastructure in Central Asian nations continues to be the lowest, according to the World Economic Forum's 2012 Global Competitiveness Report. Furthermore,¹³⁸ the region's weak and ineffective trade facilitations continue to drive up the price of importing and exporting commodities. Better economic connectivity between Central and South Asia can be made possible by the construction of transportation and road routes across Afghanistan. Road lanes across Afghanistan have been

¹³⁵ - Ibid

¹³⁶ - Ibid

¹³⁷ - Svante E. Cornell S. Frederick Starr, *Modernization and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: A New Spring?* Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2018, ISBN: 978-91-88551-12-2, Printed in Lithuania, p: 61, E-mail: info@silkroadstudies.org

¹³⁸ - Xavier Sala-i-Martin, Professor, *World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2012*, World Economic Forum, Centre for Global Competitiveness and Performance, Geneva, 2011

suggested by the ADB as a way to link Pakistan and Iran's five seaports with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.¹³⁹

Therefore, regional trade could increase by up to 15%, or more than \$12 billion, in accordance with their predictions. The potential benefits of these corridors are enormous, both for Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, as exports from Afghanistan would increase by 202% in the five years following construction. With an additional 4.1 percent GDP growth and the creation of 4.1 million permanent jobs, this would have a direct impact on Afghanistan's GDP. The World Bank estimates that the construction of the corridors will increase regional trade overall by 160 percent and the GDP of all participating countries by more than 5 percent annually. Afghanistan thus has a considerable potential to facilitate regional economic growth and integration, if it is realized.¹⁴⁰ Afghanistan is an important participant in regional and global economic cooperation due to its strategic location. Huge reserves of oil and gas are found in Central Asian nations, which are crucial for sustaining the world economy. The Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) pipeline, Central Asia and South Asia (CASA1000) and Turkmenistan Uzbekistan Tajikistan Afghanistan Pakistan (TUTAP) electricity transmission line can be used as an alternative route for moving oil and natural gas from Central Asia to South Asia. Afghanistan serves as a crucial transportation link in the proposed Five Nations Railway Corridor (which aims to connect China to Iran via Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan).¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ - Asian Development Bank (Mar 2005), Second Ministerial Conference Report on the Economic Impact of Central-South Asian Road Corridors

¹⁴⁰ - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESEARCH CENTER, September 2012.

¹⁴¹ - Zobair Salahi, *Afghanistan: A Junction of Asia's Connectivity*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, May 28, 2022, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/afghanistan-a-junction-of-asias-connectivity/>

Afghanistan is well placed to benefit from a multitude of factors, as its natural centrality is now based on the changing regional economic equation because of broader global economic factors and not on the simple political demarches of single players.¹⁴²

2.4 Importance of Afghanistan for China

There has been a long history of trade and intellectual exchange between China and Afghanistan. Buddhism and Islam entered China from Afghanistan through trade in fruit and tea. In their strategic and cooperative partnership, China and Afghanistan agreed to work together on regional and global issues as well as in the political, economic, cultural, and security spheres.¹⁴³ Since it started its economic reform in 1979 and opened up its markets to foreign trade and investment, China has experienced unprecedented economic growth. For the past 31 years, the country's annual gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by 9.9 percent. In contrast, GDP growth in the largest economy in the world, the United States, has averaged 2.8% over the past three-decades.¹⁴⁴ Over 50% of China's oil consumption comes from imports, and the International Energy Agency (IEA) predicts that within a few years, that percentage will rise to 70% to 80%. China already imports more than 80% of its oil from the Middle East, with 90% of that oil traveling through the Straits of Malacca in the Indian Ocean to get to China in the South China Sea.¹⁴⁵

China is well aware of the fact that US carriers and gunships are in charge of securing the Straits of Malacca. Beijing views of energy dependence on foreign sources and on transportation

¹⁴² - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FORGIAN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESOURCH CENTER, September 2012.

¹⁴³ - Rawan N., Grishin O. E. Importance of Afghanistan for Regional Security in South and East Asia. Post-Soviet Issues. 2020;7(1):94-103. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2020-7-1-100>

¹⁴⁴ - "The celestial economy, by 2030 China's economy could loom as large as Britain's in the 1870s or America's in the 1970s", *The Economist*, September 10, 2011

¹⁴⁵ - *China's Geostrategic Search for Oil*, John Lee, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2012, 35:3 pp. 75_92

routes it cannot fully control as a strategic risk to the nation's growth and social stability. Because of its concern over energy dependence, China is forced to make long-term strategic choices that will have a significant impact on global security, not just in its own region.¹⁴⁶

Beijing's overarching goals are to increase the country's overall strategic reach by establishing a stable zone across its western territory, establishing a safe entryway into the Middle East's energy-rich region, expanding Chinese soft power, and developing comprehensive trade and investment opportunities.¹⁴⁷ In the on-going initiatives of transnational interconnectedness planned by China, Afghanistan could be a key player. For Beijing's national interests, courting Afghanistan as a geo-economics' partner makes sense for a number of reasons. First, gaining access to China's vast mineral deposits and energy reserves would strengthen the competitive positions of top companies operating in its strategic industrial sectors. Afghanistan is also included in the Belt and Road Initiative through infrastructure projects as a way to strengthen ties with Iran and Central Asia.¹⁴⁸ However, due to China's role as the financier of the existing Turkmenistan- China pipelines, gas delivered to China at much lower negotiated prices as Turkmen gas supplies to China increase from their current levels. Similar agreements reached and gas prices would have similar agreements, as the new proposal would increase gas flows to China. China has proven to be capable of constructing the energy pipelines as planned and has a record of accomplishment of establishing closer ties with the target

¹⁴⁶ - Ibid

¹⁴⁷ - Chambers M.R. (Nov, 2002). South Asia In 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances. Carlisle: U.S. Army War College; 2012. 500 p. URL: https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2002/ssi_chambers.pdf [Accessed: 04.12.2019].

¹⁴⁸ - [Jose Miguel Alonso-Trabanco](#), Afghanistan's Fate Will Be Shaped by Geo-economics, [SITUATION REPORTS](#) September 20, 2021. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/afghanistans-fate-will-be-shaped-by-geo-economics/>.

countries. Beijing can therefore be considered an essential partner in promoting regional integration.¹⁴⁹

2.5 Middle East and Afghanistan

Iran has political objectives as well as a desire to expand its financial influence in Afghanistan. Today, Afghanistan is less of a political and military weak country than Iran, and it is a chance for Iran to develop a relation with Afghanistan both economically and culturally.¹⁵⁰ Iran has recently had to compete with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for influence in Afghanistan, especially since the United States has been there since 2001, with dire consequences for stability in the region specifically for the Iran. Iran wants to exert financial influence over Afghanistan. Approximately 13,500 trucks cross the Afghan border each day, and its consumer goods compete well with those of Pakistan.

In late 2004, an Iranian Trade Facilitation Bank started in Kabul. Tehran generously supported the rebuilding of Afghan infrastructure throughout a five-year period in order to further boost the Afghan market, expanding its initial pledge of \$560 million in upgrades and practical resources for Afghanistan's energy grid. With promises of a tenfold increase in energy export to other cities,¹⁵¹ a 132-kilowatt power transmission line to Herat was inaugurated in January 2005. An estimated \$68 million was spent on building the 122-kilometer highway that

¹⁴⁹ - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESEARCH CENTER, September 2012.

¹⁵⁰ - Marvin G. Weinbaum, (2006), "Afghanistan and its Neighbours", Report, *USIP*, June 2006, p. 12, See also Janne Bjerre Christensen, (2001), "Strained Alliances: Iran's Troubled Relations to Pakistan and Afghanistan", Danish Institute for International Studies, *DIID Report* 2001:03, p.12.

¹⁵¹ - Mohsen Milani, "Iran and Afghanistan", United States Institute of Peace (USIP), online at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-andafghanistan>.

connects Herat with northern Iran. The Iranian port of Chahbahar¹⁵² is a fascinating option to Pakistan's new port at Gwadar for both Afghanistan and Central Asia thanks to the extension of the Iranian railway system to western Afghanistan and its connection with the port.

Other upgrading projects are also planned. Iran's monetary surplus and the steep increase in oil prices provide Tehran with additional channels through which to influence regional affairs. It is said that Iran is becoming more assertive in its business operations in Afghanistan. Iran's economic sector interests and the country's expanding markets in Afghanistan are likely to be the main drivers of any additional Iranian power expansion in Afghanistan.¹⁵³

2.6 New Great Game and the Relevance of Afghanistan to Central and South Asia

The phrase 'Great Game' was first used in the 1830s in Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* and in the first decade of the twentieth century it became generally accepted and popular¹⁵⁴. It was a conflict between two imperial powers over territory and populations, the value of which rested on their location between the Russian and British empires. For political dominance, they controlled Central Asia's oil and gas fields as well as regional pipelines. It has been compared to the Great Game between the Russian and British empires¹⁵⁵ in the 19th century.

The New Great Game is centered on the control of trade, pipelines, and natural resources. The term 'New Great Game' has also been used to refer to competition for influence, power, hegemony, and profits, frequently in reference to the oil and gas industries and reserves in

¹⁵² - Smruti S. Pattanaik, *Afghanistan and Its Neighborhood*, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), In Search of a Stable Future, p: 22

¹⁵³ - Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, Special Report, United States Institute of Peace 1200 17th Street NW Washington, DC 20036 www.usip.org.

¹⁵⁴ - MATTHEW EDWARDS, *The New Great Game and the new great gamers: disciples of Kipling and Mackinder*, *Central Asian Survey* (March, 2003) 22(1), p: 84. .

¹⁵⁵ - MATTHEW EDWARDS, *The New Great Game and the new great gamers: disciples of Kipling and Mackinder*, *Central Asian Survey* (March, 2003) 22(1), 83–102, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233164187> ¹⁵⁶ - Ibid, p: 83

Central Asia and the Caucasus.¹⁵⁶ The objective is to create strategic equations based on trade and economic linkages. American efforts to integrate Central, South, and Southeast Asia effectively are evidence of it. However, this new conflict is not a repetition of the 19th century's 'Great Game', in which Central Asian states were essentially pawns in a power struggle¹⁵⁷. Despite the Clear cartographic attempts to remap Eurasia strategically.

The energy-rich region of Central Asia has been the site of the 'New Great Game' since 1991.¹⁵⁸ It becomes a vital part of the process that decides the fate of the international order in this area. The interests and objectives of Russia, China, and the United States are all different. They now actively decide who gets what, when, where, and how¹⁵⁹ in the geopolitics of the Central Asian countries. Instead, the governments of Central Asia are engaged in the fight for power and are in a strategic position to exert influence over Russia, China, Iran, and the Indian subcontinent. Previously seen during the Soviet era as a peripheral region of little importance, Central Asia will play a significant role in Asian politics in the ensuing ten years. Under Enlargement and Engagement, the US places a high priority on domestic political stability, regional stability, and the development of market economies in the five Central Asian states. For the stability of the Asian area, especially Central Asia, economic security is essential. The development of democracy and political stability depend on a robust and thriving market economy. Political stability is necessary for economic development though, and it must be

¹⁵⁶ - Ibid, p: 83

¹⁵⁷ - Dianne L. Smith, CENTRAL ASIA: A NEW GREAT GAME? Source: Asian Affairs: An American Review , Fall, 1996, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Fall, 1996), p: 147-148 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30172401>

¹⁵⁸ - Musharaf Iqbal & Manzoor Khan Afridi, New Great Game in Central Asia: Conflicts, Interests and Strategies of Russia, China and United States, P:235

¹⁵⁹ - Ibid

attained before the economy can really take off in places like Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir.

The five new Central Asian states face significant political, economic, ethnic, religious, and social barriers in their quest for regional stability. Any state's potential to become a power in this new Great Game of influence will depend on its capacity to confront and resolve these problems. Although there may be opportunities for regimes like Iran or China to expand their influence, the chances of instability turning against them are just too great. As a result, Russia, Iran, India, China, and Pakistan all aspire to increase their regional influence while promoting stability in Central Asia.¹⁶⁰ In the post-Cold War period, both major powers and neighbors in the area are interested in the independence of the mineral-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs).

The Central Asian Republic and Afghanistan have a shared border, and oil and gas travel through Afghanistan. Afghanistan has the ability to develop into an economic hub that doesn't rely on outside help because of its natural resources and location. The US State Department said in June 2010 that minerals and metals worth \$3 trillion had been found in Afghanistan, and the New Great Game also took an exciting turn at that point. If properly investigated, this¹⁶¹ may "change the game" for Afghanistan by making it one of the biggest producers of copper and iron ore¹⁶² in the world.

¹⁶⁰ - Dianne L. Smith, *CENTRAL ASIA: A NEW GREAT GAME?* Source: Asian Affairs: An American Review, Fall, 1996, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Fall, 1996), p: 147-148 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30172401>

¹⁶¹ - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESEARCH CENTER, September 2012.

¹⁶² - Ibid, p:11

The US Geological Survey, the Department of Commerce, USAID, the Pentagon,¹⁶³ and the State Department all assist Afghans. The deposits contained lithium, rare earth elements, gold, niobium, copper, iron, copper, cobalt, and cobalt. Despite the announcement of the finding of an oil field in northern Afghanistan, there was no mention of uranium resources. In Afghanistan, China and India have each won multibillion-dollar contracts for coal, copper, and other commodities.¹⁶⁴

China and India has a clear economic competition, and their geopolitical rivalry has expanded. An earlier Russian suggestion to resolve the Afghan crisis through the UN Security Council was rejected by the Americans. Additionally, the official recognition of the New Great Game changed the strategic landscape.¹⁶⁵ However, this was made challenging by ongoing instability brought on by the influence of neighboring countries and US aggression. According to estimates, Afghanistan's natural resources are worth \$3 trillion. Since 1979,¹⁶⁶ Afghanistan has dealt with both classic and non-traditional issues like unstable security, foreign invasion, and drug trafficking. There is escalating turmoil in South Asia, its biggest market, and Central Asia.

The regional and global communities are very concerned about NATO and the United States' exit from Afghanistan. Because of the geopolitical confrontation between the interests of powerful nations and Afghanistan's dangerous areas, maintaining security in that country is getting more difficult. For Iran and Russia, both of whom want to lessen US control in the area, the geopolitics of the transit route through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan pose a

¹⁶³ - Khalil-ur-Rehman, *The New Great Game: A Strategic Analysis*, *The Dialogue* Volume IX Number 1, p: 6

¹⁶⁴ -Ibid, P: 7

¹⁶⁵ - Ibid, p:6

¹⁶⁶ - Masood Aziz, *AFGHANISTAN: THE GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION* The Emergence of China as the New Facilitator, NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FORGIAN AFFAIRS, NORWEGIAN PEACEBUILDING RESOURCH CENTER, September 2012.

serious challenge. In a similar vein, the scenario in this climate in Afghanistan worries both Pakistan and India.¹⁶⁷

2.7 Energy Security and Regional Cooperation through Afghanistan

Afghanistan has the potential to develop into a center for the transportation of energy due to its strategic location. It links South Asia and Central Asia, which are both energy-rich and energy-hungry regions, respectively. The main energy-rich states bordering Afghanistan to the west and north are Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. An encouraging factor is the desire of Central Asian nations to diversify their energy markets, which are now highly dependent on Russia. As a result, Afghanistan has access to short-term energy supplies, regional stability for everyone's benefit, and potential energy transit fees (economic growth). Through energy trade across these areas, the advantages of energy exporting, importing, and transit nations have been emphasized.¹⁶⁸

To gain from the interregional energy trade between the Asian regions, Afghanistan improves its security and investment climate. It facilitates the granting of licenses, the purchase of land and rights of way, and the facilitation of legal, regulatory, and other clearances. It must also encourage large-scale investments. If these components were in place, the majority of the demands of the private sector for developing cross-border energy infrastructure through Afghanistan met.¹⁶⁹ In the modern world, energy is crucial. Natural resources are used to fulfill basic human needs and improve the standard of living for people. However, many countries

¹⁶⁷ - Muhammad Imran¹Dr. Ghulam Mustafa² Muhammad Rizwan Bhatti³, *Geopolitical Dynamics of Afghanistan and Concerns of Regional and Global Actors vis a vis Pakistan*, journal Pakistan Social Sciences Review, September 2020, Vol. 4, No. III [792-806],

¹⁶⁸ - Saadatullah Ahmadzai^a,*, Alastair McKinna^b, *Afghanistan electrical energy and trans-boundary water systems analyses: Challenges and opportunities*, journal: Energy Reports, Available online 2 August 2018, p: 445 ,

¹⁶⁹ - Farkhod Aminjonov, *Afghanistan's energy security Tracing Central Asian countries' contribution*, Friedric Ebert Stiftung Afghanistan Office, Shar-e Nau, Charahi Ansari, Yaftali St, Kabul, Afghanistan, February 20, 2016

throughout the world do not guarantee access to natural resources. Some energy supplies have an impact on both the surrounding countries and other countries. The bulk of energy resources used to make money, which can be problematic in locations with a variety of ethnic groups and political instability.¹⁷⁰ The 1973 crisis gave rise to the current energy security paradigm, which is primarily concerned with how to handle any interruptions in the flow of oil from producing nations.¹⁷¹ The safety of the whole energy supply chain and infrastructure now be included in the definition of energy security, which is a massive effort.

Energy interdependence and the growing breadth of energy commerce need for continual cooperation between producers and consumers to ensure the security of the whole supply chain. In the global energy economy, long-distance, cross-border pipelines are becoming more prevalent. As worldwide markets grow more interconnected, the amount of global energy trade will rapidly increase, making the issue of energy security increasingly pressing in the coming years.¹⁷²

2.7.1 Energy Cooperation between the Neighboring Countries

Through research and development, these Asian nations have been able to imagine an "energy organization" that transmit power from energy-rich to energy-poor nations, bridging the energy gap. Since the economies of South-Central Asia interconnected, cooperation and access to one another's natural resources essential to accelerating economic development. Afghanistan

¹⁷⁰ - Saadatullah Ahmadzai a,*, Alastair McKinna b, *Afghanistan electrical energy and trans-boundary water systems analyses: Challenges and opportunities*, Contents lists available at Science Direct Energy Reports journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/egy

¹⁷¹ - Ibid

¹⁷² - Anna Deister, Mohammed Shinwari, and two other, *Afghanistan Reconnected Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014*, The EastWest Institute(EWI), Report on the Abu Dhabi Process Consultations 2013-2014, The EastWest Institute 11 East 26th Street, 20th Floor New York, NY 10010 U.S.A., May 2014.

has finished multibillion-dollar cross-border energy, communications, and infrastructure projects while becoming more significant as a transit route between energy-rich Central Asia and energy poor South Asia.¹⁷³

Sincere efforts by Afghanistan to integrate its neighbors into the region's geo-economics are a good step since regional cooperation is the most effective method for accomplishing its objectives. It will help to alleviate its electricity shortages by multilateral energy projects with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, which also act as an energy corridor to Pakistan.¹⁷⁴

This deal benefits the economies of all the involved nations. Pipelines and cross border power networks are only two examples of the various energy transmission companies that are connected by a "Asian Energy Highway" in the region. The most efficient way to address the region's energy problem may be to build a regional power matrix linked to a regional power market. A regional power source is needed to connect sustainable power sources to a sizable enough market in order to decrease speculation. In this approach, the overall sustainability of such efforts is improved. An outstanding example of this is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), whose principal objective in Central Asia was to provide access to the region's energy supplies. Similar to this, the BRI's principal objective was to establish energy supply channels throughout the region due to the rapid political events in the area.

A fresh paradigm for regional growth has emerged. In order to explore the necessity for cooperation in the energy sector, as well as expanding energy, trade, and other potential, representatives from Central Asia convened in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁷⁵ The majority of

¹⁷³ - Zarghona Totakhail, *A Study of the Geo-economics of Afghanistan with it's Central and South Asian Neighbors*, Kabul Education University, Vol-6 Issue-4 2020 IJARIE-ISSN(O)-2395-4396 , 12356 www.ijarie.com 835.

¹⁷⁴ - Ibid, p:835

¹⁷⁵ - Zarghona Totakhail, *A Study of the Geo-economics of Afghanistan with it's Central and South Asian Neighbors*, Kabul Education University, Vol-6 Issue-4 2020 IJARIE-ISSN(O)-2395-4396 , 12356 www.ijarie.com 835.

the countries in Central and South Asia, including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, have abundant natural resources that, if wisely utilized via national efforts, could provide sustainable and clean energy to all the countries in the region. Power trade between Central Asian nations is extremely constrained. Pakistan receives its power from Iran, whereas Afghanistan receives it from Central Asian nations. It is essential to increase the capacity of this trade by switching from bilateral to multilateral agreements in order to alleviate the energy shortages in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Furthermore, there are huge regional differences in the accessibility of energy supplies. For instance, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have large gas and waterpower production potential, whereas Kazakhstan has enormous coal deposits. Trade and the exchange of electricity sources might benefit both nations. Similar to Iran, Pakistan is said to have enormous coal deposits, and commerce with Iran (which is abundant in natural gas) and Afghanistan will considerably benefit all three of these countries.¹⁷⁶

2.7.2 Afghanistan's Connectivity for Energy Cooperation

Afghanistan is an important country in the area, and its ability to serve as a link between South and Central Asia is critical for growth and interregional cooperation, notably in the energy sector. The "Transformation Decade" in Afghanistan (2015–2025) witnessed a sharp rise in energy usage, with one of its objectives being to promote economic growth.¹⁷⁷ The vast and mostly unexplored energy resources in the California region have generated international rivalry for the production and distribution of gas and oil via pipelines that go both inside and beyond the

¹⁷⁶ - Saddam Hussein, Energy, Technology, and Services Building Blocks of Regional Connectivity, Research Economist, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,

¹⁷⁷ - Farkhod Aminjonov, *Afghanistan's energy security Tracing Central Asian countries' contribution*, Friedric Ebert Stiftung Afghanistan Office, Shar-e Nau, Charahi Ansari, Yaftali St, Kabul, Afghanistan, February 20, 2016, P: 13

www.fes-afghanistan.org

region. Following the events of September 11, 2001, three significant regional energy and infrastructure projects came under the scrutiny of the governments of Afghanistan and its 'near and extended neighbors' in Central and South Asia, reviving or igniting previously dormant trilateral and multilateral discussions.¹⁷⁸

The goal of multiple significant regional energy projects is to turn Afghanistan into a transit country. Afghan authorities are keen to promote these projects for a variety of reasons, including economic, political, and, to a lesser extent, energy security.¹⁷⁹ Despite its natural riches, the country will be forced to rely heavily on energy imports to satisfy its needs. Afghanistan now uses only 6.69 percent of its annual 3.81 megawatts of no diminishing hydropower capacity.¹⁸⁰

In terms of regional energy, Afghanistan has the potential to serve as a South Asian energy transit country. Building oil and gas pipelines via Afghanistan from Central Asia to India would increase energy income for Iran and Central Asia, which would be advantageous for almost all of the countries in the region. Afghanistan plays a crucial role in allowing complementary trade between the two regions and so improving regional trade possibilities since it is the quickest and most affordable transit route between Central and South Asia. The quickest and least expensive gas and electricity transmission lines are those linking Central and South Asia found between Afghanistan and Pakistan when compared to other possibilities.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ - Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi, *BETWEEN COOPERATION AND INSULATION, Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics*, June 2014, p: 10, © Afghanistan Analysts Network 2014.

¹⁷⁹ - Farkhod Aminjonov, *Afghanistan's energy security Tracing Central Asian countries' contribution*, Friedric Ebert Stiftung Afghanistan Office, Shar-e Nau, Charahi Ansari, Yaftali St, Kabul, Afghanistan, February 20, 2016, P: 18. www.fes-afghanistan.org

¹⁸⁰ - A, Ahmed, C. M Shahariar and M. A. Rashid Sarkar, *Energy Cooperation in South Asia: Prospects and Challenges*,

¹⁸¹ - Anwar, 2020. Linking Pakistan to Central Asia seen as a way to boost Afghan peace [WWW Document].

DAWN.COM. URL <https://www.dawn.com/news/1560050>

2.7.3 Energy and Socio-Economic Impacts on Afghanistan

Due to its central Asian location, Afghanistan has enormous potential for economic growth both within the country and beyond the region. Due to its geographical position, Afghanistan serves as an ideal hub for regional and international trade and transit interactions. Afghanistan's transportation network provides alternatives for tying Central Asia to South Asia, East Asia, and beyond in terms of trade and tourism.¹⁸² By making use of its natural riches and utilizing its strategic location, Afghanistan develops a robust economy. Afghanistan considerably benefits as an energy trading and transit country by facilitating energy flows between these regions, which it borders to the north and south with energy-rich Central Asia and energy-scarce South Asia.

Moving forward, we plan to create a framework of cooperation that enable us to connect the region in a web of trade, energy, and transportation links. This can not only be a significant confidence-building measure, but it will also help to increase regional economic synergies and promote economic growth in Afghanistan and beyond¹⁸³. In any economy, electricity is required for both the production and consumption of goods and services. The development of science and technology, which is a key factor in the improvement of living conditions.¹⁸⁴ Worldwide, everyone requires electricity. As industrialization and the economy intricately linked, electricity infrastructures have emerged as a key opportunity for Afghanistan's development. The massive

¹⁸² - Anna Deister, Mohammed Shinwari, and two other, Afghanistan Reconnected Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014, The East West Institute(EWI), Report on the Abu Dhabi Process Consultations 2013-2014, The East West Institute 11 East 26th Street, 20th Floor New York, NY 10010 U.S.A., May 2014.

¹⁸³ - Ibid

¹⁸⁴ - Apergis, N., Payne, J.E., 2011. *A dynamic panel study of economic development and the electricity consumption-growth nexus*. Energy Econ. 33 (5), 770–781. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2010.12.018>.

increase in population, country industrialization, extensive urbanization, and incentives for improving living standards are all contributing to the rising demand for energy globally.

The energy surplus in Central Asian countries and the energy shortage in Afghanistan (India and Pakistan) present Win-win scenarios and the alignment of regional interests, for collaboration and commerce must be commonplace in the energy sector.

Afghanistan must thus play a crucial part in enabling the distribution of regional energy sources, particularly gas and electricity. Because the majority of Afghanistan's neighbors are directly or indirectly involved in its conflicts, this will benefit Afghanistan monetarily through transit fees while also promoting stability for both countries' interests.¹⁸⁵ Despite Central Asia's energy surplus and Pakistan and India's energy deficit, Afghanistan is the most efficient route for moving energy between the two regions.

¹⁸⁵ - Bochkarev, D., 2014. *Afghanistan Reconnected: Linking Energy Supplies to Consumers in Asia*. The East West Institute, New York, U.S.A., Retrieved from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/178147/Danila%202014%20Final.pdf>.

CHAPTER THREE

CHALLENGES TO AFGHANISTAN'S REGIONAL ROLE

Despite the geopolitical significant and geo-economics potential of Afghanistan it remains difficult for the country to take up its role for connectivity and regional integration for development purposes. There are multiple challenges that hinder Afghanistan to play its role as a potential regional connectivity actor. Afghanistan has been embroiled in violence since the 1970s, devastating the nation's economy and infrastructure. Afghanistan's inability to participate in regional integration is hampered by the security situation, infrastructure deficit, lack of bilateral and multilateral agreements to facilitate cross-border trade and transit, and political instability. For the regional connection project to be implemented successfully, security in Afghanistan is very important. Projects connected to integration might be hampered by terrorism and instability on a regional and global level. In order to accomplish the regional connectivity projects, Afghanistan must overcome a number of internal and foreign obstacles.

3.1 Internal Challenges

Internally, Afghanistan has been in political turmoil. The absence of legitimate, stable government machinery in Afghanistan has led to many problems, including corruption, weak governance, and political and ethnic disputes. Bad governance, extensive corruption, and political divides based on political and ethnic objectives remain dominant features of the Afghan administration. Countries with a shared desire to build the aforementioned projects are unlikely to invest in Afghanistan unless the administration guarantees an efficient plan that will enable the country to overcome these problems.

3.1.1. Domestic Political Instability

Political instability arises when the government of a nation feels like it can be overthrown at any time and by any means. It has an impact on a country's socioeconomic progress. It affects a nation's economic development. Unfair rights distribution among a state's citizens is a major contributor to political instability.¹⁸⁶ A nation's political structure must be stable in order for economic growth and long-term investments to flourish. However, caste was never a significant factor in Afghan politics, even before the Saur Revolution. The conventional balance of power between ethnic groups has undergone significant change because of the Afghan war.¹⁸⁷ Regional stability and intra-Afghan tribal and cultural unity divided in 1973 when Sardar Daud, a military coup leader, deposed King Zahir Shah. Afghanistan's unity and nonaligned neutrality was destroyed by the Soviet invasion of the country on December 28, 1979.¹⁸⁸ These fault lines occasionally led to armed clashes in the open between the mujahidin and mujahidin, particularly between the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the complete withdrawal of American forces in 1992.¹⁸⁹

A breakdown in ethnic relations results in the government collapsing and greater bloodshed, possibly leading to civil war. It also prompts increasing meddling from Afghanistan's neighbors. Additionally, it raised neighboring countries' intervention, opening the door for terrorist organizations to operate in a disordered and ungoverned Afghanistan. A greater conflict

¹⁸⁶ - Zaheer Abbas, Manzoor Khan Afridi, Inayat Kalim, *Mitigating Challenges of CASA-1000 for Greater Regional Cooperation*, journal Global Regional Review (GRR), Vol. III, No. I (2018), DOI: 10.31703/grr.2018(III-I).07 p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X, URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018\(III-I\).07](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018(III-I).07).

¹⁸⁷ - Khan Muhammad Fahim & Ali Sajid & Hashmat Khan,. (2021). Ethnic Conflict and the Political Instability in Afghanistan. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354207466_Ethnic_Conflict_and_the_Political_Instability

¹⁸⁸ - Ibid

¹⁸⁹ - [M. Jamil Hanifi](#), **Causes and Consequences of the Destabilization of Afghanistan**, Middle East Institute, April 18, 2012. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/causes-and-consequences-destabilization-afghanistan>.

might result from increased hostility between the warlords of Afghanistan's various factions allowing terrorist groups to operate in a more chaotic and ungoverned Afghanistan. Increased violence between Afghanistan's several factions and warlords led to a larger battle.¹⁹⁰

The link between the core and the peripheral has broken down as a result of the breakdown of the central power structure.¹⁹¹ Countries interested in constructing the regional integration projects are unlikely to invest in Afghanistan until the government can guarantee an effective strategy that enables the nation to overcome these issues. In order to establish a viable economic and trade link with Asian nations, the Afghan government must first reform its institutions and mechanisms while fostering transparency, unification, and integration; otherwise, the targeted plans for regional connectivity remain merely wishes.¹⁹²

3.1.2 Absence of Peace

In many ways, instability hinders Afghanistan's relationship with and absorption into the rest of the region. It delays regional integration by discouraging nations from using Afghanistan as a hub for trade and transportation. In addition, while providing the region's fastest means of communication, Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation deters international investment, particularly in infrastructure projects that support the nation's integration objectives.¹⁹³ Conflict and insecurity endanger the global order, paralyze societies, take lives, reduce food production,

¹⁹⁰ - Sadika Hameed, Hannah Brown, Elias Harpst, *Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia Afghanistan's Role*, CSIS (center for strategic and international studies), A Background Paper of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation, January 2014.

¹⁹¹ - Muhammad Fahim Khan, Sajid Ali, Hashmat Ullah Khan, *Ethnic Conflict and the Political Instability in Afghanistan*, Pak. Journal of Int'L Affairs, Vol 4, Issue 2(2021), p: 423.

¹⁹² - Mohammad Yonus Noorzi, Afghanistan: Regional Connectivity Hub, <https://www.ejournals.eu/pliki/art/20751/>

¹⁹³ - Mariam Safi, Bismillah Alizada. *Afghanistan: Prospects and Challenges to Regional Connectivity* // The Diplomat, 19.04.2019. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/afghanistan-prospects-and-challenges-to-regional-connectivity>.

create employment, and ruin livelihoods. According to the World Bank, two billion people today reside in nations where protracted wars have a negative impact on their ability to develop.¹⁹⁴ Due to its advantageous position, Afghanistan serves as a strategic interface for regional and international forces. Afghanistan has had a number of challenges that have contributed to its instability despite its geopolitical significance. In addition to concentrating on national infrastructure development, Afghanistan cooperates with neighboring nations to address challenges in both Afghanistan and the region.

Building highways and railroads, for instance, contributes to the goal of regional connection. Long-term instability has been identified as one of the key obstacles to regional connectedness in Afghanistan. These obstacles partially neutralize the benefits of Afghanistan's strategic location and diminish its potential for regional integration. The ongoing conflict has slowed down the development of large-scale regional projects. Since the conflict is still ongoing, concrete action must be taken with the help of friends and colleagues in the area. In addition to the above, the region is currently unstable due to the presence of numerous terror organizations.¹⁹⁵

For instance, there are active terrorist groups and networks in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. A unified front should be present in the fight against terrorism and all other armed groups. These are considered significant roadblocks to regional integration and economic cooperation. Additionally, regionalism is ineffective in the face of unpredictability and insecurity. The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be a key worry for the international community. Only a secure and peaceful Afghanistan offers a better trajectory route for sustained

¹⁹⁴ - World Bank Group, *Fragility, 2017, Conflict and Violence Overview of World Bank (Washington DC: World Bank Group)*, April 2017.

¹⁹⁵ - UNITED NATION REPORT, Killings, Suffering of Afghanistan's People 'Must End Now', Special Representative Tells Security Council, Demanding Greater Action by Global Community, 23 MARCH 2021. <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14472.doc.htm>.

economic operations.¹⁹⁶ States in South and Central Asia, as well as other regional powers, are concerned that the expansion of Islamic political movements endangers their own security interests if Afghanistan returns to anarchy.

3.1.3 Social Issues

Illiteracy, low literacy, a lack of advanced education, and a general lack of information are all regarded markers of instability. A lack of knowledge is a significant element that can lead to management ineptitude, incorrect financial management, non-normative policymaking, and other issues that can stifle growth and progress. The household's main source of income is the head of the household, and his status is one of the most powerful predictors of instability.¹⁹⁷ The lack of a well-organized, understanding, and united government administration has been a huge issue for the government and a problem for information networks in Afghanistan, as illiteracy has been a major problem for our people's well-being.¹⁹⁸

The Afghan education system is, on the whole, of poor quality. The educational infrastructure, educational resources, and instructional methodologies are all lacking. According to UNICEF (2020), over 3.7 million children in Afghanistan are not in school, the majority of them live in rural regions. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "insecurity, shortages of school buildings and textbooks, rural access challenges, poor data dependability, and the suspected selection of teachers on the basis of cronyism and

¹⁹⁶ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies Volume 2 Issue 1
Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021. <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>

¹⁹⁷ - Farid Ahmad Farzam Rahimi "impact of security and regional integration on poverty reduction in Afghanistan", *Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 8, No 1, 2015, pp.186. DOI: 10.14254/2071-8330.2015/8-1/16

¹⁹⁸ - Weekly Analysis 316, Center for Strategic & Regional Studies Kabul (CSRS), Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 316 (August 31 – September 7 2019), P: 4

bribery" are the causes for the disparity (SIGAR). Similar challenges arise at the university level.¹⁹⁹

Afghanistan's government is not able to embrace a bright and robust economy, political stability, or stable peace in the future unless it pays close attention to its youth's education. In other words, the education of Afghanistan's youthful generation is critical to delivering long-term reforms to the country's citizens. The fundamental hope of a nation resides in the appropriate education of its youth, as Erasmus expresses himself succinctly. So, the future of Afghanistan's security, economic prosperity, democratic government, civic consciousness, and, ultimately, offering Afghans hope for a brighter future lies in investing in the country's youthful people.²⁰⁰

3.1.4 Economics Issues

Afghanistan's unstable environment, the legacy of 40 years of persistent fighting, is perhaps the most visible— and definitely the most publicized— impediment to its economic progress, and the outlook for Afghanistan's economy is unfortunately bleak. Any scenario will result in a smaller economy for Afghanistan, significantly higher rates of poverty, and fewer job opportunities for the 600,000 Afghans who reach working age each year. When basic services are severely disrupted and poverty levels rise, human development outcomes are likely to worsen.²⁰¹ Recent political changes have cast uncertainty on Afghanistan's economy. In August, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, having an immediate negative impact on a faltering economy.

¹⁹⁹ - Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report —Afghanistan, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

²⁰⁰ - Hamidullah bamik, Illiteracy is more Perilous than Terrorism for the Government of Afghanistan, Published 3years ago on April 7, 2019, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/author/hamidullahbamik>.

²⁰¹ - The World Bank In Afghanistan, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview> .

It is anticipated that an abrupt decrease in foreign grant money, loss of access to offshore assets, and disruptions in financial linkages will cause a significant economic slump, poverty rates, and macroeconomic instability.²⁰²

In Afghanistan, weak government, a lack of support from the private sector, complex economic regulations, corruption, and a disregard for the rule of law all function as barriers to investment and connection. Afghanistan's importance as a hub for regional transportation and an energy supplier, for instance, depends on how well the government can run the industry, which is beset by mineral extraction and non-payment of royalties.²⁰³

The lack of meaningful foreign help has impeded efforts at economic growth. Among other things, the state of food and nutrition, infrastructure, hospitals, police, roads, and schools is still dismal. The business sector is faced with a number of significant problems, including a lack of energy, high levels of corruption, restricted access to money and land, poor legal redress procedures, inadequately trained forces, and taxation. The gap among rural and urban areas' levels of development has grown.

In Kabul, new buildings, retail centers, private television channels, and Chinese, Italian, and Thai restaurants have all appeared. However, outside of Kabul in the rural regions, there are still no basic amenities, and 36 million people continue to live in poverty.²⁰⁴ Afghanistan wants to grow within the regional connection, but the present administration is reluctant to take action against the industry's illegal networks.

²⁰² - Ibid

²⁰³ - Ahmad Bilal Khalil, *Linking Afghanistan to China's Belt and Road*. // The Diplomat, 24.04.2017. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/04/linking-afghanistan-to-chinas-belt-and-road>.

²⁰⁴ - MITHILA BAGAI, *Challenges In Afghanistan*, World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues, Vol. 18, No. 2 (SUMMER (APRIL-JUNE) 2014), pp. 115-116, Published by: Kapur Surya Foundation Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48505442>.

3.1.5 Security Issues

Afghanistan is the region's shortest route between countries, but because of its security situation, it is not the best choice. Due to its unstable environment, Afghanistan's trade and transit relations with the region are developing, albeit slowly.²⁰⁵ In today's world, nobody is immune to the negative effects of their unstable and insecure neighbors. The safety and prosperity of bordering regions have suffered as a result of the unrest in Afghanistan²⁰⁶. Despite having great ambitions for regional initiatives and despite the efforts of regional and extra regional governments to assure Afghan participation, Afghanistan faces several obstacles. Instability and terrorism have the potential to thwart related activities. Afghanistan has been experiencing warfare since the 1970s, which has severely damaged and destroyed its economy and infrastructure. Fulfilling the project's potential still faces several uncertainties and obstacles.

Afghanistan's worsening security situation is the first and most urgent worry due to an increase in violence and terrorist attacks, as well as the growing influence of extremist organizations.²⁰⁷ The security situation is getting worse as the peace process drags on. The 40 years of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan have left behind an unstable environment, which is maybe the most obvious and certainly the well-publicized barrier to the country's economic development. The practicality of connecting projects is greatly hampered by the inability to guarantee infrastructure security and the lack of ongoing, safe access to disputed areas, raising concerns that many regional routes may choose to totally avoid Afghanistan. Violence and

²⁰⁵ - Mariam Safi and Bismillah Alizada, *Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative*, Review, Analysis and Prospects, P: 44, August 2018.

²⁰⁶ - *evolving situation in Afghanistan role of major powers and regional countries*, Islamabad policy research institute (IPRI) fifth floor ET complex, sir agha khan rode, sector F-5/1 Islamabad, Pakistan.

²⁰⁷ - Ashraf Ghani, "Russia: Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Russian Congress," Afghan Videos, YouTube, July 16, 2015 u <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZR7PLYwhZg>.

unrest would put the project in danger in addition to preventing Afghanistan from gaining the economic benefits that come with stronger regional ties.²⁰⁸

Afghanistan won't be able to fully take advantage of the economic opportunities brought forth by regional initiatives unless its security situation and high-tech industrial capacity improve.²⁰⁹ Afghanistan's integration and connection to the rest of the region are hindered in many ways by instability. It delays regional integration by discouraging nations from using Afghanistan as a hub for trade and transportation, for instance. Afghanistan also has a shortage of funds for industry development and a lack of infrastructure.²¹⁰ Although Afghanistan has the region's fastest means of communication, the country's unstable security environment deters international investment, particularly in infrastructure projects that support the country's integration objectives. It is all the more important for Afghanistan to engage and reassure potential partners and investors in light of the current situation, in which international investors are discouraged by a lack of assurances about the financial and physical safety of their interests.²¹¹

While the country's potential for expansion is constrained by the inability to declare the entire nation a 'safe zone' for investment, the problems that all of the partner states face are instability or insurrection. Afghanistan, a crucial state in the endeavor, suffers greatly as a result

²⁰⁸ - Meena Singh Roy, *Afghanistan and the Belt and Road Initiative*, Source: Asia Policy, No. 24 (JULY 2017), pp. 103-109 Published by: National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26403208>.

²⁰⁹ - Mariam Safi and Bismillah Alizada, *Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative*, Review, Analysis and Prospects, P: 44, August 2018.

²¹⁰ - Ibid

²¹¹ - EWI Policy Brief by: Annie Cowan With contributions from Muhammad Amin and Charles Elkins Brussels, *Afghanistan Reconnected: Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of China's Belt and Road Initiative*, March 2018, P: 8.

of all these atrocities. Afghanistan is the project's most challenging partner because of its current state.²¹² Afghanistan is the project's most challenging partner because of its current state.

The amount of regional commerce has been severely impacted because of the instability in Afghanistan, which has also presented many difficulties and obstacles. Large-scale regional initiatives are frequently stuck. The integration and flow of products between Central Asia and South Asia are hampered by this volatility and insecurity.²¹³

3.1.6 Corruption

Corruption is commonly defined as the misuse of public office or public responsibility for private, group or sectional gain. Typically, corruption is seen as an impediment to a successful war to peace transition.²¹⁴ Corruption, nepotism, and clientelism have harmed state institutions. Afghanistan has to be serious about fighting corruption. It is urgent to allay concerns raised by the international community over the Afghan government's slow anti-corruption drive. It would be terrible for the government and the populace to alienate the world community given the current political and security situations. The misuse of public position or duty for personal, group, or sectional advantage is a frequent definition of corruption.²¹⁵

²¹² - Zaheer Abbas, Manzoor Khan Afridi, Inayat Kalim, *Mitigating Challenges of CASA-1000 for Greater Regional Cooperation*, journal Global Regional Review (GRR), Vol. III, No. I (2018), DOI: 10.31703/grr.2018(III).07 p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X, URL:

[http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018\(III-I\).07](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018(III-I).07).²¹⁰ - *evolving situation in Afghanistan role of major powers and regional countries*, Islamabad policy research institute (IPRI) fifth floor ET complex, sir agha khan rode, sector F-5/1 Islamabad, Pakistan.

²¹³ - *evolving situation in Afghanistan role of major powers and regional countries*, Islamabad policy research institute (IPRI) fifth floor ET complex, sir agha khan rode, sector F-5/1 Islamabad, Pakistan.

²¹⁴ - Jonathan Goodhand (2008) *Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Post-conflict Peace building in Afghanistan*, International Peacekeeping, Published online: 21 May 2008. 15:3, 405-423, DOI: 10.1080/13533310802058984, To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310802058984>.

²¹⁵ - Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report Afghanistan. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022, This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Corruption is frequently viewed as a barrier to a successful war to peace transition. Afghanistan experiences corruption, much as many other developing nations. There are several potential factors for fraud since foreign donors are flooding the country with significant quantities of money in the form of aid. In a failing state like Afghanistan, it is very difficult to confront corruption and governance. It is also crucial to combat corruption, which has continued to be at the center of the government's reform push. According to Transparency International's 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, Afghanistan ranked 172nd out of 180 countries.²¹⁶ The government is putting into practice a number of steps to improve governance. The National Action plan for trying to combat Corruption, which includes organizational changes in the public sector, was published in October 2017. The Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework adopted in November 2018 at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, at which the government and aid partners committed to stepping up efforts to combat corruption.²¹⁷

The United States first missed the opportunity to make anticorruption initiatives a key component of its strategy because it failed to realize the existential threat that corruption represented to the reconstruction effort as expenditure mounted. The underlying presumption was that individual Afghans were to blame for corruption, and that donor initiatives offered a remedy. Years would pass before the US realized that its excessive expenditures and lack of fiscal discipline were fostering corruption.²¹⁸

By giving warlords political and financial support, the US helped establish a class of authoritarian leaders at the local and national levels who had competing allegiances to their own power systems and the Afghan state. The US indirectly supported the continuation of criminal

²¹⁶ - Transparency International. Corruption Perceptions Index. <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>

²¹⁷ - UNAMA. Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gmaf_final_26_nov_2018.pdf.

²¹⁸ - SIGAR SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION 2530 Crystal Drive Arlington, VA 22202 www.sigar.mil By web submission: www.sigar.mil/investigations/hotline/report-fraud.aspx

actors' impunity, a lax legal system, and the growth of corruption. Despite being aware of the negative effects of working with warlords, US officials miscalculated the dangers to the Afghan effort.²¹⁹ Despite these expenses, security has only become worse. US planners introduced a new blurry adversary to the mix as the aim changed from counterinsurgency against terrorists to reconstruction-focused counterinsurgency.

Ambassador Ryan Crocker told SIGAR²²⁰ that an insurgency is not the main cause of our failure. It was the weight of widespread corruption. The Afghan government is increasingly viewed as sabotaging efforts to rebuild the country, inciting more bloodshed, and encouraging Afghans to join the Taliban. Two SIGAR lessons learned reviews found that it was extremely difficult to convict or even impeach these individuals because doing so would require "dismantling essential foundations of support for the party itself," including democratic institutions.²²¹

One of the biggest issues the nation has recently developed is corruption. According to a UNODC poll conducted in 2012, corruption is ranked as the second most significant issue facing Afghanistan²²² right after security. As a result, the government must provide public goods in an efficient and effective manner. To achieve this, it is crucial to reduce the power of strongmen as a first step in the right direction²²³.

²¹⁹ - SIGAR SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION 2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202 www.sigar.mil By web submission: www.sigar.mil/investigations/hotline/report-fraud.aspx

²²⁰ Ibid, p: 14

²²¹ Ibid

²²² - Nematullah Bizhan, *Building legitimacy and state capacity in protracted fragility: The case of Afghanistan*, international growth center, commission on state fragility growth and development, APRIL 2018. Electronic copy available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3166985>.

²²³ - Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report Afghanistan. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022, This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

3.1.7 Narcotic Trafficking

In recent years, Afghanistan has generated more than 80% of the heroin consumed worldwide.²²⁴ Many additional issues the nation is facing, such as those with government and security, aggravate this situation. The rule of law does not apply equally throughout the nation because to the resounding presence of anti-government forces in several provinces, notably in the south. In this environment, opium production, opium and heroin processing, and trafficking flourish.²²⁵ Afghanistan is among the highest opiate prevalence rates in the world after years of drug manufacture, with 2.65% of the population allegedly misusing opiates.²²⁶ Opium, morphine, and other types of heroin are all marketed once the opium poppy plant is grown and processed in Afghanistan. Each of these goods has a domestic and international market, and various parts of Afghanistan provide goods for various domestic and international markets.

Drug trafficking is a worldwide illegal business that involves the production, distribution, and sale of chemicals that are forbidden by law.²²⁷ Since drug trafficking is an international crime of concern, several nations have turned to bilateral and multilateral treaties throughout history. Afghanistan, one of the nations most impacted by narcotic drug use, has spent the previous 50 years working nonstop to address this issue, even more so in the past 17 years. The recent actions that the nation has taken range from a strict focus on law enforcement to a series of extensive social, economic, and cultural initiatives that have had varying degrees of influence on the fight against drugs.²²⁸ Opium cultivation, heroin manufacturing, and trafficking continue to be major concerns for Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors and a multibillion-

²²⁴ - UN new center " opium harvest in Afghanistan hits new high in 2014"

²²⁵ - according to the united nation mission in Afghanistan, most civilian deaths and injuries caused by antigovernment elements were in south and south east of the country.

²²⁶ - United Nation Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), research, AFGHAN OPIATE TRAFFICKING THROUGH THE SOUTHERN ROUTE, June 2015.

²²⁷ - https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/ad_hoc_committee/home

²²⁸ - Ibid.

dollar business. 263,000 hectares planted with opium in 2018, and per the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Afghanistan Opium Survey. From the record-high 328,000 hectares recorded in 2017, this was a decrease. However, there was a significant drought in Afghanistan at the time, not any successful anti-drug initiatives or stronger legal systems, which is why the decline occurred.

With around three-quarters of the world's production, Afghanistan continues to be the top opium producer. While yields and prices declined in 2018 due to the drought and a supply glut, heroin generated up to \$6.6 billion in exports for the Afghan economy in 2017. The Taliban receives up to \$121 million annually from the taxation of local farms that grow poppies, and another \$63 million goes to other anti-government organizations.

Opiate manufacturing and distribution therefore contribute considerably to the Afghan economy while also providing the Taliban and other armed organizations fighting the Afghan government as well as its foreign backers with a consistent stream of income. Except for Latin America, every region of the world is impacted by the illegal trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan, according to UNODC. Opiates generated in Afghanistan, primarily heroin, go in enormous numbers to Central Asia and Russia.

Between 2011 and 2015, the so-called northern route from Afghanistan to Central Asia and Russia carried up to 74.5 tons of pure heroin each year. Concerns about the possible benefits of the drug traffic from such transportation enhancements have been highlighted in relation to the proposed infrastructure projects including road and railway connections between Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, commentators have remarked that worsening infrastructure and greater trade ties with Afghanistan may be less significant factors in causing Central Asia's drug issue than corruption, the cooperation of security officials, and the economic

and social catastrophe in some of the region's nations. Ninety three percent of the opioids consumed worldwide in 2007 were produced in Afghanistan. No other nation has ever had such a commanding position in the world's opiate supply.²²⁹

3.2 External Challenges

Afghanistan is the victim of regional and international conflict between powerful nations. Afghanistan's development has been significantly hampered by the rivalry between these powers on a regional and international scale. Afghanistan has struggled to experience economic growth and stability over the past few decades but Afghanistan is highly deepened on foreign assistance. It costs a lot of money to complete regional connectivity projects through Afghanistan. Because of the country's ongoing conflict, which presents a significant security risk to the nation. Proxy war in Afghanistan for other interests, due to these negative trends in terms of political and economic instability, Afghanistan has been unable to maintain its position in the region. Afghanistan is an appealing and strategically vital interface for regional and global powers due to its strategic location.²³⁰ Despite its geopolitical importance, Afghanistan has faced several obstacles that have resulted in instability. Afghanistan can work with regional countries to address difficulties in Afghanistan and the region, as well as focusing on national infrastructure development.²³¹

²²⁹ - Jonathan Goodhand (2008) Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Postconflict Peace building in Afghanistan, *International Peacekeeping*, Published online: 21 May 2008. 15:3, DOI: 10.1080/13533310802058984, To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310802058984>.

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²³¹ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies* Volume 2 Issue 1 Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021. <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>

3.2.1 Foreign Involvement

The biggest external irritation in Afghanistan has been foreign engagement, with ongoing invasions and interferences in the nation's economy, polity, and territory aggravating regional integration.²³² Afghanistan stands in a hazardous neighborhood. External powers attempting to further their own geopolitical, ideological, and economic aims in the country can be held mostly accountable for the political unrest and suffering of the country's citizens. The politics and economy of Afghanistan have repeatedly drawn the attention of its neighbors, both nearby and far away. There have been instances where foreigners have acted on behalf of domestic clients, organizing and equipping them to seize control of important regions of the nation.²³³

In such a challenging area, neighboring conflict as well as external rivalry might easily spread into Afghan territory. Uzbek or Tajik political upheaval, a radicalized Pakistan, US military action against Iran, and another major confrontation between Pakistan and India might all have a substantial impact on Afghanistan. Gaining an advantage in Afghanistan has always been a factor in Pakistani and Indian calculations. State legitimacy has also been impacted by outside interference.²³⁴

Both the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the financial and military support provided to the mujahidin groups fighting the Soviet-backed Kabul government by the US and its allies, including Saudi Arabia, both reduced the perceived legitimacy of both the Kabul

²³² - MITHILA BAGAI, *Challenges In Afghanistan Source: World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (SUMMER (APRIL-JUNE) 2014), pp. 119, Published by: Kapur Surya Foundation Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48505442>.

²³³ - Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, Special Report, United States Institute of Peace 1200 17th Street NW Washington, DC 20036 www.usip.org.

²³⁴ - Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, Special Report, United States Institute of Peace 1200 17th Street NW Washington, DC 20036 www.usip.org.

government and the mujahidin groups in the eyes of the public, while also creating (or exacerbating) new forms of legitimacy through patronage and coercion²³⁵

The historical and territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, which is one of the regional tensions that maintains the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan restless and agitated, dominates the political landscape in South Asia since it is very much a ‘zero-sum’ war. In preparation for Afghanistan after 2014, India has already made some efforts to reorganize the former Northern Alliance. In addition, India is secretly collaborating with Iran to build highways that will connect Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chahbahar in an effort to weaken Pakistan's economic influence in the country. Additionally, India is attempting to go around Pakistan in order to get access to Central Asia.²³⁶

The Persian Gulf: The Persian Gulf region is the third security complex. Another difficulty Afghanistan faces is rivalry with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Additionally, the USA is attempting to use Afghanistan to advance its political agenda with the help of Saudi Arabia²³⁷.

Central Asia: The nations of Central Asia have a similar geographic landscape, a same cultural history, and similar security issues. Threats to the stability of Central Asian nations include terrorism, poor institutions, identity issues, economic difficulties, and other factors with both domestic and international root causes. One threat to regional security is the trafficking of narcotics from Central Asia.²³⁸

²³⁵ - Nematullah Bizhan, *Building legitimacy and state capacity in protracted fragility: The case of Afghanistan*, international growth center, commission on state fragility growth and development, APRIL 2018.

Electronic copy available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3166985>

²³⁶ - Sadika Hameed Hannah Brown Elias Harpst, Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia Afghanistan's Role, A Background Paper of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation, January 2014, p: 5.

²³⁷ - Farid Ahmad Farzam Rahimi "impact of security and regional integration on poverty reduction in Afghanistan", *Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 8, No 1, 2015, pp.186. DOI: 10.14254/2071-8330.2015/8-1/16. ²³⁸ Ibid

²³⁸ - Ibid.

3.2.2 Regional and International Terrorism

Since 1979, Afghanistan has had to deal with both conventional and unconventional security threats, including foreign invasion and drug trafficking. Instability from war-torn Afghanistan is thought to spread conflict to South Asia, its biggest market, and Central Asia. Moreover, poor border management and a lack of formal authority in the sub regions bordering Afghanistan have turned these ungoverned areas into hubs for domestic and international terrorism.

3.2.2.1 International Terrorism

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Afghanistan-Pakistan region came under the attention of international jihadi groups, most notably al-Qaeda, who in the 1990s carried out several destructive attacks against US bases. The Islamic state of Khorasan province (ISKP) and al-Qaeda are now the two main international terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan. Members of the 'AQ core', or bin Laden's direct political successors, as well as al-Qaeda's offshoot, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), are among the latter. Numerous organizations pose less of a direct threat to the US but have the potential to endanger US interests in the region, particularly by promoting unrest or escalating rivalry between India and Pakistan, both of which possess nuclear weapons. ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) declared its existence in Syria in 2014, and the creation of a new state in Rakka sparked concerns that they might open a new front in Central Asia, probably close to the Afghan border.

The region is in grave danger because political Islamic organizations have been allowed to cross the border into Afghanistan from Central Asian countries.²³⁹

US military members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area first noticed the presence of fighters connected to the Islamic State in 2013. The initial membership of ISKP in Afghanistan was made up of dissident Afghan Taliban leaders, former Tehrik-e-Taliban members, and supporters of Central Asian extremist groups that had once been associated with al-Qaeda. In the beginning of 2015, the Islamic State proclaimed the 'Khorasan Province' of its caliphate in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the years that followed, Islamic state of Khorasan province (ISKP) gathered tens of thousands of supporters, rose to prominence, and then declined under the constant pressure of US and Afghan security services, and the Taliban and Pakistani security personnel. It would be necessary for the new al-Qa'ida to be more scattered than the old one such a kind of al-Qa'ida is still a concern for Central Asian nations as well as the US.²⁴⁰

Islamic state of Khorasan (ISKP) is committed to creating a safe base in Khorasan for the Islamic State as it establishes a global caliphate. There is no reason to doubt that the ISKP would attack the West if given the opportunity.²⁴¹

3.2.2.2 Regional Terrorism

Following the Taliban's conquest of Afghanistan, nations in Southwest Asia are once again concerned about terrorism and civil unrest. The Taliban's close links to several terrorist groups and incapacity to rule the entire nation will give terrorists a safe haven, facilitating

²³⁹ - *evolving situation in Afghanistan role of major powers and regional countries*, Islamabad policy research institute (IPRI) fifth floor ET complex, sir agha khan rode, sector F-5/1 Islamabad, Pakistan, 2016, p: 128

²⁴⁰ Afghanistan and Regional Geopolitical Dynamics, after 11 September, *Conference Proceedings 18-19 April 200*.

²⁴¹ - *Afghanistan Study Group Final Report*, United States Institute of Peace, February 2021, 2301. Constitution Avenue NW Washington, DC 20037. E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org, Web: www.usip.org

indoctrination, terrorist, financing, training, and the export of illegal weapons and drugs. This always works against the national interests and integrity of the countries in central and south Asia.²⁴²

The rapid Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has alarmed neighboring nations, particularly the Central Asian republics (CARs). These include the rise in drug trafficking, the expansion of extremism, and the influx of refugees, all of which the CARs will find difficult to confront because of the weakness in their public health, security, and social safety systems.²⁴³

Despite harsh measures taken by Uzbekistani President Islam Karimov to stifle its operations after the defeat of the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) nevertheless poses a danger to the stability of Central Asia.²⁴⁴

3.2.3 Diplomatic Tensions between Neighbor Countries

Diplomacy has a unique function to play in strong international relations. International economic output is based on strong interstate ties. Neighbors, especially those that are economically dependent on one another, retain diplomatic ties even amid potential conflicts.

An important tool for preserving friendly relations with other nations and resolving conflicts is diplomacy. Unfortunately, the regional effort for South and Central Asia's partner states do not have a strong diplomatic history with the project's close neighbors.²⁴⁵ Afghanistan is a

²⁴² - Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy, *Decoding Small South Asian States' 'Wait and Watch' Policy Towards Taliban Ideas, Forums, Leadership, Impact*, 20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA, DECEMBER 2021, -mail: contactus@orfonline.org Website: www.orfonline.org

²⁴³ - Deepak Kumar, "Central Asia's Afghan Predicament," New Delhi, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2021, <https://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/central-asia-afghan-predicament-dkumar-080921>

²⁴⁴ Afghanistan and Regional Geopolitical Dynamics, after 11 September, *Conference Proceedings 18-19 April 200*.

²⁴⁵ - Zaheer Abbas, Manzoor Khan Afridi, Inayat Kalim, *Mitigating Challenges of CASA-1000 for Greater Regional Cooperation*, journal of Global Regional Review (GRR), Vol. III, No. I (2018), DOI: 10.31703/grr.2018(III-I).07 p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X, URL:

landlocked nation with tense ties with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran. The President Ghani administration tried to use Afghanistan's geographic position as a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia in order to revive the economy. In order to improve the market situation, the government contemplated building air corridors with significant regional players including India, China, and Turkey.

Kabul has made an effort to forge diplomatic and economic ties with Central Asian nations, particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Contact was occasionally difficult due to security concerns and diplomatic disputes.²⁴⁶ Afghanistan has a stake in a regional strategy since domestic conflicts have been fueled by competing interests of strong neighbors and international powers. It is crucial for a country to have peaceful relations with its neighbors as well as a fair mechanism for handling problems and meeting requests. At a UN conference in March 2009, President Hamid Karzai stated that the future they are seeking to build in Afghanistan is one where they will live in peace with Pakistan, Iran, their neighbors to the north, China, India, and Russia, and it is one that they cannot achieve without their goodwill and cooperation.²⁴⁷

3.2.4 New Great Game between the Power Countries

The contemporary circumstances are because of power struggles in Afghanistan between Russia and Britain and later on between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union. The struggle that arose between Russia and Britain to enhance their spheres of influence in Mughal society was called the 'Great Game'. Turkestan, India, and Persia (Iran) get them nearer to South-Central Asia. Russia and England played the 'Great Game' from 1830 until the end of the

[http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018\(III-I\).07](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2018(III-I).07).

²⁴⁶ - Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report — Afghanistan, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022, This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

²⁴⁷ - Statement By His Excellency Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, International Conference on Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context, The Hague, 3/31/2009.

19th century. The expansion of Russia in Central Asia shocked the British. England exploited Afghanistan as a buffer country on all roads to British India in order to stop a Russian foray.

The First Anglo Afghan Battle, which took place from 1838 to 1842, and the Second Anglo-Afghan Confrontation was sparked by British worries over Russian domination in Afghanistan (from 1878 to 1880). The start of the Third Anglo-Afghan war marked by May 1919 continued for just one month. Great Britain had lost its hold on Afghanistan's affairs after an armistice on August 8, 1919.²⁴⁸ It was a battle between two imperial powers for territory and peoples whose worth came from being located between the British Empires and Russian empires for political hegemony, safety, and control. Besides, Afghanistan was engaged in yet another Great Game during the Cold War. The US replacement of Britain was the only change in the country's historical course.²⁴⁹ The rivals of the Cold War, Russia, and the US, invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and 2001, respectively.²⁵⁰

The Northern Alliance backed by Russia when the Taliban rule was established and has been a persistent backer of the Afghan Government ever since the Taliban's collapse in 2001. The Taliban and Chechens had strong connections. Russia had played a more proactive diplomatic role in Afghanistan when its relationships strained with the West in the decade of 2010.²⁵¹ The US did not participate in the military debates that took place between China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Iran in 2016-17. Russia, in January 2018, advised the Taliban and the Afghan Government to engage in dialogues. Russia accused by the US of preparing or

²⁴⁸ - Ibid

²⁴⁹ - MATTHEW EDWARDS *Central Asian Survey* (March, 2003) 22(1), 83–102, The New Great Game and the new great gamers: disciples of Kipling and Mackinder

²⁵⁰ - Ibid

²⁵¹ - Ibid

equipping the Taliban in April. Russia opposes this claim, but with the rise of the Islamic State, it may view the Taliban as a partner in the Syrian contest against one of its leading opponents.²⁵²

3.2.5 Foreign Aid

Afghanistan is heavily dependent on foreign aid, which can be seen as a major vulnerability for the country. These negative interconnected trends in terms of political and economic instability have prevented Afghanistan from maintaining its position in the region for the purpose of regional connectivity.²⁵³ In recent decades, the Afghan government has been unable to come up with a plan that assures the nation's economic independence. Afghanistan's lack of economic stability, which has been plagued by ongoing conflicts that have prevented the country from achieving its economic goals, could be viewed as a contributing factor to this economic reliance. Afghanistan is significantly reliant on foreign aid, which is viewed as a source of concern. Due to these negative related tendencies in terms of political and economic instability, it has been difficult for Afghanistan to maintain its position as a regional connectivity leader. This is in a situation where regional economic integration would be hard to achieve without taking into account Afghanistan's present status.²⁵⁴

For the majority of the last two centuries, Afghanistan has relied on foreign aid. Even after the Soviet Union withdrew its soldiers from Afghanistan in 1989, Afghanistan can minimise its need on foreign assistance, particularly if it achieves political stability, reduces security expenditures, and realizes the potential for economic production. The unpredictability and often disjointed nature of most foreign aid to Afghanistan contributes to the country's lack of

²⁵² - Special Report, Afghanistan, the New "Great Game"

https://www.posri.re.kr/files/file_pdf/71/283/3110/71_283_3110_file_pdf_1456208250.pdf.

²⁵³ - Mohammad Yonus Noorzi, *Afghanistan: Regional Connectivity Hub*, p: 295

²⁵⁴ - Mohammad Yonus Noorzi, *Afghanistan: Regional Connectivity Hub*, p: 295

progress toward self-sufficiency. The majority of the international community's actions in Afghanistan, such as its attitude to aid, were of a limited duration. The pressure from the bureaucracy to spend money resulted in ill-informed investments that frequently bypassed government structures and paid little attention to sustainability and building capacity. Priorities determined by donors, not Afghans, deteriorate relations between donors as well as the Afghan government as well as between the administration and its citizens²⁵⁵.

The Afghan government has always favored receiving aid directly from donors, especially through the reputable World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. This preference is less likely realized if important institutions like the finance ministry and the central bank are thought to be losing their independence and competence. Certain funders have accepted this government preference.²⁵⁶

Direct aid to the Afghan government makes sense due to increased cost effectiveness, stronger economic multiplier effects, better alignment of donor contributions with important government goals, and strengthened government processes (when properly supervised). If Afghanistan's state financial management institutions continue to lose their independence and capacity, donor money will be more likely to be routed through third parties. This approach is popular with donors because it gives them greater influence over their financing and enables them to assist crucial sectors that would not otherwise get government support (civil society in

²⁵⁵ - Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, United States Institute of Peace, February 2021, 2301 Constitution Avenue NW Washington, DC 20037. E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org, Web: www.usip.org

²⁵⁶ - Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, United States Institute of Peace, February 2021, 2301 Constitution Avenue NW Washington, DC 20037. E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org, Web: www.usip.org

particular). The legislators of many countries, which permit financial help, strongly favor this kind of assistance.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ - *ibid*

CHAPTER FOUR

PROSPECTS FOR AFGHANISTAN'S REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Afghanistan's historic, geo-economics and geographic importance in the region has not changed despite four decades of unrest. Afghanistan's historical significance as a hub for trade with Asia is still very much present. Afghanistan has also consistently shown a desire to develop into a regional economic powerhouse. Afghanistan's geographic location holds the potential to play a comprehensive role by connecting an economic corridor. The strategic location of landlocked Afghanistan suggests a major trade and transit route connecting it to SA, CA the Middle East, and the Far East. It can open up a variety of opportunities for trade, transit, and the exchange of goods, as well as for the transportation of energy. Regarding integration, future economic development has the potential to be sustained. For the access of international market, commercial activity is essential for increase in a competitive private sector. In fact, each regional country looks for a method to help Afghan prosper while positioning itself to reap the potentially major advantage of increased economic development and connectivity in the region.

4.1 Afghanistan's Journey from a Buffer to a Hub

State and non-state actors are putting forth a lot of effort to create a climate in today's globalized world where people, communities, governments, and regions can cooperate. The broad idea of globalization has affected national boundaries and sovereignty. In the twenty-first century, globalization has made it possible for people to support investment, grow economies, open transactional relationships, offer commercial chances, and create ability, exchange

information, build infrastructures, offer security for successful collaborations, and other things. Although there is still more to be done.²⁵⁸

All of these connections have aided in the eradicating poverty, lack of education, unemployment, fraud, and instability, resulting in a developed and democratic society where everyone's human rights, as well as those of their families and communities, are respected. Both Russia and the Great Britain attempted to significantly increase their imperial roles in the region during the nineteenth century. Russian expansionism into the Indian subcontinent, which was viewed as a direct danger to the colonialist power in Asia, caused British India to be concerned. During the Great Game, Afghanistan functioned as a barrier state between these two superpowers. The nation served as a bridge between the two colonial powers during the Great Game era; if someone crossed it, they would attack the other's territory.

On the other hand, Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous country that has maintained its historical connectivity as Asia's crossroads. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan border Afghanistan on three sides over a 2,370-kilometer stretch to the north²⁵⁹. Iran lies to the southwest and west, while the Durand Line, a loose boundary between Afghanistan and modern Pakistan, is to the south. Through the Wakhan passage in the Pamir Mountains, a key crossing route between the two nations, it shares a border with China to the southeast.²⁶⁰ Recently, Central Asia has drawn attention from around the world for economic reasons as well.

²⁵⁸ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies, Volume 2 Issue1, Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

²⁵⁹ - **Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, COUNTRY PROFILE: AFGHANISTAN August 2008.**

²⁶⁰ -Ijaz Khan, *Afghanistan: A geopolitical study*. Central Asian Survey, 17 (3), 489-502. (1998), p: 490, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939808401049>.

South Asia is keen to access the natural riches of the five CARs and enhance multilateral economic cooperation with them due to its geographical proximity to Central Asia. One of the most important considerations in this respect is Afghanistan's geographic position operate as a land bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. As a result, both Afghanistan's historical relevance and its geostrategic and geopolitical significance are taken into account. In order to enhance regional connectivity and share prosperity, multilateral economic cooperation— which is possible via Afghanistan for regional integration—requires that opportunities be properly explored and present difficulties in the region be collaboratively handled.²⁶¹

4.2 Cross Road for Trades

Given that Afghanistan serves as a land bridge between numerous nations, the primary commerce routes in the country are the motorways and roads that link different regions of the nation with neighboring states. Roads, bridges, and barges connect northern Afghanistan to the Central Asian Republics. Roads link Afghanistan to Pakistan, which conducts the biggest business with Afghanistan, in the south and east.²⁶²

The Afghan government has made building physical infrastructure and repairing roads a top priority. Road and rail lines have been supported by the US, Europe, Japan, Pakistan, Iran, and India; some of them have been completed, while others are still under development. All Central Asian republics would have been less than 32 hours from the Persian Gulf and the

²⁶¹ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies*, Volume 2 Issue1, Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

²⁶² - Amina Khan, *TRANS-NATIONAL TRADE WITH FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN*, *Strategic Studies*, Winter 2007, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 88, Published by: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad Stable. [URL:http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420](http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420)

Indian Ocean once the repair of the roads is complete. Work is also currently being done to rehabilitate

Afghanistan's 3300 km ring road of national highways.²⁶³ Due to the existence of ports in Pakistan that are used to import and export goods into and out of Afghanistan, as well as the fact that Pakistan and Afghanistan share the longest shared border in the world, Pakistan is an important transit route for Afghanistan. Iran, with whom Afghanistan shares its second-longest border, is another important route.

On the other hand, there is tremendous unrealized potential in its trade with Pakistan and India. A considerable reserve of natural resources is also present in Afghanistan. Prior to now, Afghanistan and India agreed to mine an estimated 1.8 billion tonnes of iron, and China has acquired the rights to investigate the copper-rich Aynak region of Afghanistan.²⁶⁴ In 2012, Kabul made four announcements on copper and gold bids to advance its Silk Road initiatives.²⁶⁵ As part of the 2010 Afghan-Pakistan trade and transit deal, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are now anticipated to sign a commerce and transit agreement, allowing trilateral trade in the geopolitically unstable region. The agreement might enhance ties between and within Central and South Asia, but political obstacles stand in the way.²⁶⁶ The agreement might enhance ties between and within Central and South Asia, but political obstacles stand in the way. Afghanistan can only increase its commerce with other nations until it is able to securely establish trade with these nations on the basis of strong infrastructure.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ - Rebuilding of Afghanistan transnational highway in full swing:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/sa/Archive/2005/May/23-839913.html>.

²⁶⁴ - Vladimir Fedorenko, *The New Silk-Road Initiatives in Central Asia*, Rethink Paper No. 10, Washington, DC: Rethink Institute, August 2013 ²⁶⁶ -Ibid

²⁶⁵ - Ibid

²⁶⁶ -Ibid, p: 26.

²⁶⁷ - Amina Khan, *TRANS-NATIONAL TRADE WITH FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN*, Strategic Studies , Winter 2007, Vol.

4.3 Trade Transit Corridors

The positions of Afghanistan as regional and extra regional connectivity actors are very important for the Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East China, and Europe. Afghanistan has the potential to develop into a key commercial center. Natural resources abound throughout the nation, including the largest copper deposits and high grade iron ore. In addition, the country possesses resources of coal, gas, oil, and precious stones. If the Afghan economy is restored, state income will be generated, and the government will be able to offer security and essential human services to its people more than any other single move. This in turn will lessen the attractiveness and appeal of criminal and extremist activity.

In addition, it will benefit it in a way that highlights the necessity for Afghanistan to preserve friendly ties with all of its neighbors.²⁶⁸ Additionally, the Afghan government has established new relationships and signed a number of accords with its neighbors, including CA, SA Country. The following regional frameworks Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Economic Cooperation Organization Trade Agreement (ECOTA), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), are initiatives that Afghanistan participates in to resolve the existence problem and eradicate the regional trade obstacle, Afghanistan has just joined the (SAARC) as its eighth member and has begun the application procedure for WTO observer status.²⁶⁹

27, No. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 88, Published by: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad Stable.

[URL:http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420](http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420)

²⁶⁸ - Amina Khan, *TRANS-NATIONAL TRADE WITH FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN*, Strategic Studies, winter 2007, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 86-87, Published by: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad Stable.

[URL:http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420](http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420)

²⁶⁹ - "Afghanistan's Accession to the World Trade Organization", at <http://www.commerce.gov.af/wto/default.asp>

4.4 Railway Corridor

Railway corridor through Afghanistan is a big opportunity not only for country itself but also for regional and extra regional nations as regional integration, trade, and commerce will increase among the surrounding nations. The possibility of significant income help Afghanistan's weak economy and eradicating the roots of poverty and increase the living standard. A railway is crucial for a country's security, and some train routes help national defense. Through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation ²⁷⁰, the surrounding neighbors of Afghanistan's promote regional railway integration. The CAR, who had previously relied on northern routes to the Baltic Sea for access to the international economy, are now looking into the possibility of shipping goods more cheaply and closer to Indian Ocean ports through Afghanistan. Afghanistan's main three export destinations, Pakistan (26%), Tajikistan (10%), and India (26%), could benefit from trade transported by railroads that cross through Afghanistan. The reemerging Silk Road is a comprehensive strategy to establish networked supply, transit, and commercial networks from the Indian Ocean to the Ural Mountains via the reemerging Silk Road, and rail travel is a crucial component of it. We must look beyond 2014 and help the Afghan people help themselves, as Kazakhstan's foreign minister Yerzhan Kazykhanov said in 2012. In Afghanistan, investments made in the region will pay off.

4.4.1 Five Nations Railway Corridor (FNRC)

Another connectivity initiative being examined for Afghanistan is the Five Nations Railway Corridor (FNRC), which has been lauded as a potential game-changer for the country's

²⁷⁰ - Lawrence J. Pleis, Richard Lliteras, David A. Wood, Matthew D. Bain, and Steven J. Hendrickson, *The Afghanistan National Railway A Plan of Opportunity*, National Defense University, Joint Force Quarterly, 260 Fifth Avenue, S.W. (Building 64, Room 2504) Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319.

war-torn society. While the project's economic advantages for the participating nations are obvious, concerns over its prompt execution and China's expanding influence in Afghanistan also exist²⁷¹.

Another infrastructure and connection initiative has gathered pace both inside and outside of Afghanistan as it seeks alternative routes out of the pit of conflict and instability. This war-torn nation will profit from the expected economic advantages of the Five Nations Railway Link (FNRC). This is suggested as a ground-breaking Eurasian rail line²⁷². On its 2100-kilometer journey to the Iranian ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas, the project will pass through five countries: China, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The provinces of Kunduz, Balkh, Jawozjan, Faryab, Badghis, and Herat in Afghanistan will account for about 1148 kilometres, or half, of the total length of the railway line. The project's institutional partners include the Bank of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, the Asia Development Bank, the World Bank, and the United States. The project is expected to cost significantly more than \$2 billion. The Asian Development Bank will provide money for the train line's Afghan section (ADB).²⁷³

The Five Nations Railway Corridor seeks to expand trade while simultaneously promoting local business and job development. Through Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic, this project travels 2,100 kilometres between China and Iran. The Herat,

²⁷¹ - Bibhu Prasad Routray & Sayantan Halder, *Five Nations Railway Corridor Project: Increasing Connectivity & Chinese Dominance in Afghanistan*, MANTRAYA ANALYSIS#24: 27 APRIL 2018.

<https://mantraya.org/analysis-five-nations-railway-corridor-project-increasing-connectivity-andchinesedominance-in-afghanistan/>.

²⁷² - Ibid

²⁷³ - Ibid

Badghis, Faryab, Jawozjan, Balkh, and Kunduz provinces of Afghanistan would be included in the 1,000-kilometer rail corridor. The Afghan leg of the train line, which would increase Afghanistan's access to the Iranian ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas and create new potential for trade growth, will be largely financed by the ADB.²⁷⁴

4.4.2 Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway (TAT)

Based on the events of 2001, initiatives to re-establish Afghanistan's connection to the world market along the lines of the previous Silk Road have started. As a consequence, Afghanistan may now connect the Central Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Chinese markets to restore its status as a trading, transportation, and economic hub.²⁷⁵ By the end of 2014, the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan railway is anticipated to be finished. The railway will link two countries in Central Asia with Afghanistan and has the possibility to be extended farther east to Kyrgyzstan and China and farther west to Iran. A trilateral Memorandum of Understanding on the TAT railway project, which would connect Turkmenistan, the Islamic Republic of

Afghanistan, and the Republic of Tajikistan.²⁷⁶ was signed by the heads of state of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan in 2013 during a summit in Ashgabat. The Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan (TAT) railway was officially opened in June 2013 with the overarching goal of constructing a rail corridor connecting Central Asia to global markets by providing them with quick access to the Indian Ocean. In addition to Imam nazar and

²⁷⁴ - Zabihulla Jahanmal, *Five Nations Railway Corridor to Power Regional Economies*, Tolo News, 14 February 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/five-nations-railway-corridor-power-regional-economies>. Accessed 22 April 2018

²⁷⁵ - Shoaib Ahmad Rahim, *The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway*, CROSS ROADS ASIA, *The largely unheralded railroad could be the key to restoring Afghanistan's role as a regional hub*, December 09, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/the-turkmenistan-afghanistan-tajikistan-railway/>

²⁷⁶ - Available at: <https://cabar.asia/en/tat-railway-project-a-road-that-was-never-built?pdf=37187>

Attamurad in Aqina, Sheberghan in Turkmenistan, Mazar e Sharif, Andkhoy, Khulm, and Kunduz in Afghanistan, and Panjpayan and Kolkhoz Abad in Tajikistan, the 635-kilometer railroad also runs through these cities. Approximately \$2 billion is the total anticipated cost. At a ceremony on November 28, 2016, both Ashraf Ghani and Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, the presidents of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, were present. Turkmenistan officially launched its finished railway link with Afghanistan. The initiative has significant implications for each of the three nations.

The Afghan and Tajik economies are suffering tremendously because of their isolated, landlocked location, poor infrastructure, and constrained economic growth. The transportation network in Afghanistan is completely destroyed over the course of decades of fighting. This infrastructure has to be repaired in order to make use of the nation's potential for trade and transportation. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan both share a 1,206-kilometer border with Afghanistan. But because of a lack of transportation infrastructure, trade between the three countries has remained relatively modest. By establishing a connection between Central Asia and the world's markets, Afghanistan would be able to boost business through the construction of railway lines²⁷⁷.

4.4.3 China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

CPEC has the potential to be a significant factor in utilizing South Asia's resources for beneficial trade and economic goals. Although the benefits of the corridor depend on

²⁷⁷ - Shoaib Ahmad Rahim, The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway, [CROSSROADS ASIA](https://thediomat.com/2016/12/the-turkmenistan-afghanistan-tajikistan-railway/), *The largely unheralded railroad could be the key to restoring Afghanistan's role as a regional hub*, December 09, 2016. <https://thediomat.com/2016/12/the-turkmenistan-afghanistan-tajikistan-railway/>.

Afghanistan having a stable government, it can also benefit northwest India and Afghanistan. SAARC was established to promote regional cooperation so that its members might take use of one another's resources and sources to for the commercial collaboration. CPEC is a huge source of cooperation for SAARC countries to expand their commercial operations. Natural resources are abundant in all SAARC member countries and can be used to the advantage of the local populace. Trade between SAARC nations and other Central Asian, Middle Eastern, and African awaits expansion direly.²⁷⁸

The commerce and transportation route between China, Pakistan, and Central Asia is the quickest and most effective when it passes via Afghanistan. Trade between the CARs, Pakistan, and China will be facilitated through Afghanistan, saving time and resources. Afghanistan is an important hub for regional trade, but it is also a significant source of violence. Although Afghanistan is endowed with precious minerals, these are rarely used in its exports since they are yet unexplored. The second-largest copper deposit in the world, MesAynak, was the subject of a 30-year deal between China and the Afghan government in 2008.²⁷⁹ CPEC which is shortest route toward CA seems like an impossible option for product and transportation without peaceful Afghanistan. Transporting energy through gas pipelines, for example, is a different matter since Afghanistan cannot be avoided.²⁸⁰

The western route from Torkham to Jalalabad and the southern route from Chaman to Kandahar are the two separate routes via which Afghanistan will benefit from CPEC. Afghanistan would

²⁷⁸ - Dr. Muhammad Nawaz Bhatti, Dr. Ghulam Mustafa, Farzad Ahmad, *China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges*, Pakistan Social Sciences Review, March 2020, Vol. 4, No. 1 [296] P-ISSN 2664-0422 OISSN 2664-0430

²⁷⁹ - Mir Sher Baz Khetrان and Muhammad Humayun Khalid, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Gateway to Central Asia*, Strategic Stud 2019.05:455-469. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com. 111.68.97.103 on 04/09/22. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

²⁸⁰ - Ibid

greatly benefit from a cheaper and much easier route connecting it to Gwadar, which will further provide it access to the Indian Ocean and beyond.²⁸¹ Although the CPEC and Gwadar are designed to have regional connectivity with India and Afghanistan, becoming a part of CPEC might help forge and enhance regional coordination and cooperation.²⁸²

4.4.4 New Silk Road

Afghanistan is located in the center of Eurasian Island, which is a cross road of the cultures that connects the south Asia to the Europe, Middle East and China. The most part of the economy of the country is primarily based upon agriculture, despite the fact that it still has enough of mining and hydrocarbon production reservoirs, and which might have a role in the future business and markets of Afghanistan. Even after the prolonged 25 years of conflagration, Afghanistan is reemerging from her ashes, both in terms of her infrastructure and economic conditions²⁸³. Back in July 2011, in India, the former US secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, presented a new initiative in her speech, it was called as the “New Silk Road”. This was primarily due to the connection of Afghan mainland to the central and South Asia, therefore in future it shall stand and survive on its own, once the foreign troops have left the place. This plan of Hillary Clinton was to connect Mumbai, via Pakistan, to Kabul, and from Kabul to Tashkent, Astana, and beyond. As a result, Afghanistan will be able to increase her resources, services,

²⁸¹ - Editor: Muhammad Amir Rana, *Associate Editors: Safdar Sial, Razeshta Sethna, Conflict and Peace Studies*, Pak Institute for Peace Study (PIPS) Research Journal, , P: 20, *VOLUME 6 July-Dec 2014 NUMBER 2*

²⁸² - Muhammad Muneer, “*Extending CPEC to Afghanistan*,” IPRI, March 8, 2018, <http://www.ipripak.org/extending-cpec-to-afghanistan>

²⁸³ - The Asian Development Bank is a regional development bank to promote social and economic development in Asia

development of her people, exploration of more jobs for its people, and exploit the availability of the natural resources in west and central Asia.²⁸⁴

The primary and ostensible purpose of this project is to encourage and facilitate the economic integration and the security of Eurasia. This will place the Afghanistan as the middle.

What this project reckons is to connect the markets, mitigate and eliminate the tariffs, and bolster the infrastructure. In this scenario, it can be clearly stated that this economic project alone can do wonders and perform what the military has for the last 20 years failed to achieve. Furthermore, this initiative emphasizes upon the urge of having a nonmilitary cooperation and encouraging the Trans, regional trade blocks. This will generate facilities which will comprise energy and transport.²⁸⁵ And along with that, the bringing together of the global and regional organizations together is also consequential. These goals of regional trade and movement will likely bring development, stability and success for the central and south Asian countries. Moreover, through this project, Afghanistan will also bring a more useful use of the natural resources, which it possesses. In addition, along with that, it will bring more jobs for its people. As a regional strategy, the New Silk Road concept emphasizes the importance of non-military cooperation in developing and expanding trans-regional economic blocks. It will make facilities of transit and improve the cooperation in terms of energy and transport, and this will be only possible only with the tireless efforts of the international organizations and regional states. For the central and south Asian states, and even way beyond, this project will bring and facilitate

²⁸⁴ ibid

²⁸⁵ - Tabasum Firdous Firdous A. Dar, *The New Silk Road Strategy Revisited*, The University of Kashmir informally known as Kashmir University is a collegiate public state university located on the western side of Dal Lake in the city of Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir, India which was established in 1948.

<http://ccas.uok.edu.in/Files/93269b6c7f53-4439-ae9a-3bdf55a4c649/Journal/e00ebfec-df88-48ad-97a75bceadafe3b6.pdf>

them in terms of cooperation and economic boost up. Moreover, it will provide peace and wealth to the states. Hillary Clinton, due to its potential of transforming “adversaries into allies”, called it as the cornerstone of the US strategy.²⁸⁶

Nonetheless, this project shall in the wake of US withdrawal from Afghanistan be encouraged, and halt it from not again going into the hands of Russian federation. General James Mattis had even reduced the funding for this initiate. This was due to the fact that state department never wanted to go south with this project. Some sources claim that the Chinese version of the New Silk Road (BRI) was more successful than its American counterpart. The chinese, in order to enhance and strengthen the new version of new Silk Road (BRI), have contributed almost equivalent to \$1.4 trillion. And, along with that, the government has a set up new banks, known as the new silk bank and the Asian Infrastructure investment bank. This clearly indicates that the Chinese version of infrastructure is flourishing on an unprecedented level compared to its counterpart.²⁸⁷ However, this is no comparison in between the two projects. The chines project, on one hand, passes through Pakistan and central, which bypasses Afghanistan. While the American model, on the other hand, has a direct purpose of building the infrastructure inside Afghanistan. The two projects work in tandem to boost Afghanistan's connections both within the region and abroad, while one aims to close the infrastructure gap in Afghanistan.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ - Mariam Safi and Bismillah Alizada, *Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative Review, Analysis and Prospects*, The Friedrich Ebert Foundation is a German political party foundation associated, but independent from, the Social Democratic Party of Germany. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kabul/15587.pdf>

²⁸⁷ - Ibid

²⁸⁸ - Ibid

4.4.5 Lapis Lazuli Corridor

Lapis lazuli one of the other projects for regional and international integration which connect Afghanistan to Eurasia Afghanistan sign agreement for this project with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Turkmenistan for this project in November 2017.²⁸⁹ This project has extensive potential for the partner countries. The corridor is a route for trade and commerce which starts from Aqina and Turghundi in the Afghan provinces of Faryab and Hirat, continues to Turkmenbashi port in Turkmenistan, crosses the Caspian Sea, travels to Baku in Azerbaijan, then to Poti and Batumi ports in the Black Sea via Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and finally travels to Europe via Turkey. The whole route makes use of land, rail, and maritime transit.

Lapis lazuli is an ancient commerce route. Afghanistan used it for transportation of goods to other regions of the whole world. Its name comes from the ancient trade route that was used to sell lapis lazuli and other semiprecious stones from Afghanistan more than 2,000 years ago to North Africa, Russia, the Balkans, Europe, and the Caucasus. Afghanistan was the project's main proponent, and when it first emerged in 2012, there were only four other nations involved. Its goal was to extend Afghanistan's access to the Black Sea.²⁹⁰ Later, Turkey became a part of the corridor, extending the commercial route to Istanbul and Kars, and ultimately to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. The Lapis Lazuli corridor was seen to be the best route for Afghanistan's commerce with Europe in terms of speed, cost, and dependability. By identifying Afghanistan as a hub for linking markets in South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, the agreement constitutes a critical step for Afghanistan's regional integration and

²⁸⁹ Ibid

²⁹⁰ - Quadri lateral Conference 'Lajward Route' And Access To Black Sea Holds In Ashgabat
<http://bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/business/item/14005-quadri-lateral-conference-%E2%80%98lajward-route%E2%80%99-and-access-to-black-sea-holds-in-ashgabat.html>

economic security.²⁹¹ As a result, it enhances other regional integration initiatives, especially the Five Nations Railway Corridor Project and its connection to the Middle Corridor Project of Turkey.

4.4.6 Wakhan Corridor

Geographically speaking, the Wakhan Corridor is exceptional since it links China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The corridor is a small area of land in the Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan. It shares a border of 300 kilometers in the south with Pakistan, 260 kilometers in the northeast and west with Tajikistan, and 74 kilometers in the north with China.²⁹²

The Wakhan Corridor is around 350 kilometers long and 16 to 64 kilometers wide. It links China and Afghanistan and divides Tajikistan and Pakistan. While Upper Wakhan is situated on the eastern side of the Pamir River and its tributaries, Lower Wakhan is situated on the western side of the Panj River Valley. You will encounter the Pamir Knot, also known as Bam-e-Duniya, as you travel east into Upper Wakhan, where three enormous mountain ranges intersect (Roof of the World). Afghanistan's political influence will grow with the opening of the Wakhan Corridor, which will also help to balance its relations with both international and regional countries.

The Afghan government would have better access to these regions, enabling it to build infrastructure and enhance the living circumstances of the area's poor residents. The opening of

²⁹¹ - Shoaib Ahmad Rahim, *Lapis Lazuli Corridor: Meeting the Economic Aspirations of Afghanistan and Member Countries*, Kardan Journal of Economics and Management Sciences (KJEMS), 2 (3) 70, ©2019 Kardan University Kardan Publications Kabul, Afghanistan <https://kardan.edu.af/Research/CurrentIssue.aspx>.

²⁹² - Dr. Muhammad Munir and Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, *GEOSTRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF WAKHAN CORRIDOR FOR AFGHANISTAN, CHINA AND PAKISTAN*, the National Defense University, NDU. <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/issue/download/13/118>

the route and the development of the infrastructure would be advantageous for Afghanistan's political destiny.²⁹³ In order to underline the geostrategic and economic importance of this corridor, including the adjacent nations for regional and extra regional major powers, countries that are directly and indirectly connected to the Wakhan Corridor engage in strategic contact.

A major focus of economic development in the area has been the connecting of this corridor with the energy-rich Caspian Region and the construction of energy transportation linkages with China in the form of oil and gas pipelines. In the seventeenth century, the United Kingdom became interested in the region's energy resources. Since then, the United Kingdom has fought wars against Afghanistan in an effort to dominate it, but it has been unsuccessful. In order to expand its maritime trade, the former Soviet Union has also made an effort to reach the Arabian Marine (warm waters). In order to accomplish this, it invaded Afghanistan and took control of the Wakhan Corridor, which China had already shut in 1949.²⁹⁴

The Wakhan Corridor has significant geopolitical and economic potential. It is bordered to the north by the stunning Pamir Mountains and to the south by the Karakoram Range. An MOU was signed in 2009 between Afghanistan and China for the construction of a road that would pass the Wakhjir Pass in the Wakhan Corridor and link Islamabad to Kashgar, Xinjiang, and the recently finished Karakoram Highway. The CPEC extended to Central Asia most affordably via this road, which would also give access to the warm waters off Gwadar.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ibid

²⁹⁴ - Malik, Yaser, (2014), *Geo-political Significance of the Wakhan Corridor for China*, Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences. 7. 307-323, 10.1007/s40647-014-0017-z.

²⁹⁵ - The Daily Times is an English-language Pakistani newspaper. Launched on April 9, 2002, Daily Times, is simultaneously published from Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. The newspaper was owned by Governor of Punjab and Pakistan Peoples Party member Salmaan Taseer.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/672855/role-of-afghanistan-in-regional-economic-connectivity/>

The Wakhan corridor and Karakorum Highway connected to provide China the quickest access to its massive projects in Afghanistan and to the enormous Chinese market for Afghans.

The Wakhan Corridor, if built, would be the least expensive trade route between China, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan compared to the current alternatives because it would help landlocked Tajikistan gain access to Pakistan's ports and allow Pakistanis to travel as quickly as possible through Afghanistan to the resource-rich Central Asian republics. The four nations should be compelled by this to transform the land barrier into a connecting line. CPEC now benefits China and Pakistan, but Afghanistan and Tajikistan joined later. The Wakhan route joining the CPEC will undoubtedly boost trade and alter the region's economic landscape. Political roadblocks and security worries should not hinder regional prosperity or economic progress.²⁹⁶ The region would benefit from further initiatives like CPEC and Chabahar, which concentrate on regional integration and economic cooperation. If these megaprojects are connected in good faith, they may enhance and improve local trade and transportation at the lowest practical cost and with a number of benefits. The lives and livelihoods of the locals would alter as a result of the construction of infrastructure in this area. Regional investments in commerce and infrastructure would give communities dependable job opportunities while also reviving their historical connections to the Silk Road. Greater peace and security in the area would result from connecting neighboring nations and boosting economic integration.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ - fairobserver.com was first indexed by Google more than 10 years ago
https://www.fairobserver.com/region/central_south_asia/wakhan-corridor-china-pakistan-afghanistantajikistanworld-trade-news-81661/

²⁹⁷ - Ibid

4.4.7 Chabahar Port

The largest project connecting India to Central Asia via Iran and Afghanistan is the Chabahar port. The three-nation agreement was finally signed on May 24, 2016, after ten years of negotiations that started in 2003, with India spending \$ 500 million in Phase 1 of the building of the Persian Gulf seaport of Chabahar. To move its goods through Afghanistan to Central Asian markets, India upgraded it to a trilateral agreement. Afghanistan may now use the harbor and the transit routes for business purposes. The Chabahar port would improve communication between the three nations.²⁹⁸

India's access to Chabahar port thought to make it easier for it to compete with Pakistan's 80kilometer-distance Gwadar port. Along with acting as the entry point for India into Central Asia, Chabahar port is crucial to the South-North transit lanes that go via Afghanistan to Central Asia before continuing on to Russia and Europe overall.²⁹⁹ This port will provide Kabul access to warm waters without going via Pakistan and allow India to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran. The need for a Chabahar port has increased due to the likelihood of Indian involvement in Afghanistan's mining industry. In November 2011, with government backing from India, Afghanistan gave four of the five blocks of the Hajigak iron-ore deposit to a group of seven Indian enterprises led by the state-owned Steel Authority of India. Most of the iron ore exported from Hajigak would go through the Chabahar port. Afghanistan, Iran and India formally signed an

²⁹⁸ - International Monetary Fund. Middle East and Central Asia Dept., Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Volume/Issue: [Volume 2017: Issue 378](#), Publisher: International Monetary Fund, ISBN: 9781484332917, ISSN: 1934-7685, Pages: 29, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781484332917.002>

²⁹⁹ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies Volume 2 Issue 1 Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

agreement on May 23, 2016.³⁰⁰ Thanks to Indian investment and port building, these businesses would be able to transport their raw materials from Afghanistan to India for processing at much cheaper costs and bypass the dangerous tribal regions of Pakistan. In addition, there are a lot of untapped metals and minerals in Afghanistan. According to the US Geological Survey.³⁰¹

Afghanistan possesses 60 million tons of gold and copper resources, 2.2 billion tons of iron ore, 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements, and untapped oil and gas potential. Due to its strategic location, Afghanistan can provide access to South, Central, and West Asia. By avoiding Pakistan's road routes and ports, Afghanistan views Chabahar as an additional entry point to the outside world for its exports and imports, notably with India. Due to Indian investment, Iran's isolation in the world has also been reduced. The competitive environment and the development of ports by other jurisdictions have presented new challenges for the regional nations.³⁰²

4.4.8 International North-South Trade Corridor (INSTC)

The idea for the North-South trade corridor emerged on September 12, 2000, in Saint Petersburg at a transportation conference. India, Russia, and Iran all agreed to this in a signed agreement. The next nations to enlist in 2005 were Azerbaijan and the corridor's primary objectives include shorter delivery times from India to Russia, as well as to countries in Northern and Western

³⁰⁰ - Ajay Patnaik, *India's Silk Road Strategy: Can It Meet China's Belt and Road Initiative? China's Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*, Editor: B.R. Deepak, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi India, ISBN 978981-10-5971-1 ISBN 978-981-10-5972-8 (eBook), Library of Congress Control Number: 2017947838.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5972-8>

³⁰¹ - Saber Salem, *New Opening to The Old Gateway: Chabahar Seaport and The Economic and Strategic Benefits to The Region*, *Jindal Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, Issue 1.

³⁰² - Shafiq ur Rehman Solangi, *Development of Chabahar Port: Challenges and Implications for Pakistan and CPEC*, *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol 1: Issue I, Jan-Mar 2019.

www.eresearchjournal.com,

Europe and Central Asia.³⁰³ The corridor is the ideal substitute for the 16,000 km (8,000 mi) long Suez Canal route, which passes through the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, and Saint Petersburg (Russia) in 40 days. The new corridor is 7,200 kilometers long and contains a multimodal transportation network that connects it to highways, railroads, and the sea. The new route is 30% less expensive and 40% shorter than the old one.³⁰⁴

The medium-term growth of the North-South route could also occur in the Trans Afghanistan Corridor's development, which will connect Afghanistan,³⁰⁵ Iran, Pakistan, and India, and would increase the importance of the Eastern Route. That project is part of an international effort to bring peace to Afghanistan (RECCA).³⁰⁶ The India, Iran, and Afghanistan Corridor is a different land and sea route that will let India reach Afghanistan. Iran seeks to bolster its position in Central Asia in order to counter the influence of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. During Ashraf Ghani's rule in Afghanistan, India invested \$150 million in the 218kilometer Zaranj-Delaram Highway. The highway connects Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, Herat in the west, Ghazni and Kabul in the east, and Kandahar in the south. Connecting the Central³⁰⁷

4.4.9 Fiber Optic link with China through Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor

Linking China through the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan, this can function as a crucial crossroads for trade and travel between eastern and western civilizations, and it has the potential to develop into a center for undersea and intercontinental communications in the future. Afghanistan

³⁰³ - [MASUD AHMAD KHAN](https://nation.com.pk/2022/08/01/international-north-south-trade-corridor/), International North South Trade Corridor, On **Aug 1, 2022**, <https://nation.com.pk/2022/08/01/international-north-south-trade-corridor/>

³⁰⁴ - Ibid

³⁰⁵ - Vinokurov, E., Ahunbaev, A., Shashkenov, M., Zaboev, A. (2021) The International North-South Transport Corridor: Promoting Eurasia's Intra- and Transcontinental Connectivity. Report 21/5. Almaty, Moscow: Eurasian Development Bank. <https://eabr.org/en/analytics/special-reports/>.

³⁰⁶ - Ibid

³⁰⁷ - [MASUD AHMAD KHAN](https://nation.com.pk/2022/08/01/international-north-south-trade-corridor/), International North South Trade Corridor, On **Aug 1, 2022**, <https://nation.com.pk/2022/08/01/international-north-south-trade-corridor/>

has the chance to grow into a modern-day ICT hub for Central Asia. To do this, the region needs to create new opportunities and expand existing commercial optical fiber ‘transit’ links via South and Central Asia, boosting accessibility, capability, and income in the area.³⁰⁸ The main objective of the digital silk road to create better economic integration among the South and central Asia through Afghanistan is to advance educational sectors.³⁰⁹

Even though the majority of the fiber optic network has already been installed, linking it to China represents a huge investment with the potential to significantly advance growth and generate jobs. Additionally, a connection between China and Afghanistan across the Wakhan border is conceivable. This 480-kilometer OFC route would link the Chinese border with Faizabad, in the Badakhshan region. A PPP model is used to build this link. Connecting Badakhshan and Bamyan Province to the backbone network would be a short-term objective. In 2015–16, one of the medium-term objectives would be to connect three additional provinces to the backbone network (Kunar, Kapisa, and Ghulam Khan).³¹⁰ ³¹⁰ A five-year investment term would demand an investment expenditure of around US\$50 million. Afghanistan aspires to serve as a contemporary ICT center for Central Asia by enhancing the current operational environment for ICT and giving direct political decisions and directions for Open Access and liberalization.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ - Professor Mohammad Najeeb Azizi, THE DIGITAL SILK ROAD: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AFGHANISTAN, https://www.academia.edu/43985771/THE_DIGITAL_SILK_ROAD_AN_OPPORTUNITY_FOR_AFGHANISTAN.

³⁰⁹ - Ibid

³¹⁰ - Middlebrook, Peter & Waissi, Wahid & Stacey, Jeff & Ponzio, Richard, (2015), Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan - The Silk Road through Afghanistan

³¹¹ - Professor Mohammad Najeeb Azizi, THE DIGITAL SILK ROAD: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AFGHANISTAN, https://www.academia.edu/43985771/THE_DIGITAL_SILK_ROAD_AN_OPPORTUNITY_FOR_AFGHANISTAN

4.4.10 Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)

Central Asia Economic cooperation program is one of the multinationals that looks to enhance collaboration between CAR, SAR, Mongolia, Azerbaijan and China that was launched by Asian development Bank in 2001 for the purpose of customs, power, transportation and commerce facilitation. CAREC will facilitate the economic cooperation for regional and cross border infrastructure projects, and Asian development bank will provide funding for under process projects as CAREC enjoys the considerable financial advantage. The creation of border-crossing procedures and the standardization of transportation data in the area are the core strengths of SPECA.³¹²

(CAREC) Program's new long-term strategy framework for the years 2030 and beyond is provided by CAREC 2030. It is motivated by a goal to provide a platform for open and inclusive regional collaboration that links individuals, laws, and initiatives for common and sustainable development. The 2011–2020 strategy framework provided in CAREC 2020, 4 has served as the direction for CAREC activities.

The strategy framework's vision is one of 'standers partners, well Neighbors, and positive Prospects'. According to CAREC 2020, prosperity will be shared and growth will be accelerated via collaboration, based on increased trade and increased competitiveness. Afghanistan got membership CAREC in 2005 and has since benefited from \$2.1 billion in investments in energy, trade, and transportation. ADB, which also acts as the CAREC Secretariat.³¹³ It provides funding for some of these developments. Afghanistan's prospective location as a connectivity actor is supported by a numerous of recent advancements in regional collaboration Afghanistan is the

³¹² - Anna Deister, Mohammed Shinwari, and two other, Afghanistan Reconnected Regional Economic Security Beyond 2014, The EastWest Institute(EWI), Report on the Abu Dhabi

³¹³ - carecprogram.org was first indexed by Google more than 10 years ago
<https://www.carecprogram.org/?feature=tokyo-declaration-regional-cooperation-afghanistan-development>

members of (CAREC), a group that promotes coordinated efforts to connect the economies of Central Asia. According to ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda, ADB has supported six significant regional road and rail routes in Afghanistan as part of CAREC. These include the Ring Road, the north-south corridor, the motorway from Kabul to Jalalabad, and the railway from Hairatan to Mazar-Sharif. Construction of regional transmission lines is being supported in the energy industry in order to supply Afghanistan with power from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.³¹⁴

4.5 Energy Projects:

Afghanistan's geostrategic position enables it to play a variety of roles by acting as an economic link among the surrounding nations, and allowing each other to get benefits from existence potential such as energy, gas, power electric resources CA, and expand their economies by having access to the larger market in the region.³¹⁵ Afghanistan might possibly act as an 'energy bridge' for energy flows moving from Central Asia to South Asia because of its strategic location and close proximity to large gas and hydroelectric power providers, a situation that would be advantageous to all parties. Energy demand in South Asia, where consumers are willing to pay premium prices, is vast and rapidly rising. As they flow through Afghanistan from the north to the south, the significant economic potential of regional integration may be briefly explained. An Afghan 'energy bridge' might link these complimentary sub-regions as part of a larger 'Silk Road'

³¹⁴ - Ibid

³¹⁵ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies, Volume 2 Issue1, Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

and provide Afghanistan new investment opportunities, notably in the trade, infrastructure, mining, and energy sectors.³¹⁶

Major regional energy initiatives exist that aim to transform Afghanistan into a transit nation. Afghan authorities are keen to promote these initiatives, mostly for political, economic, and to a lesser extent, energy and security-related reasons. While there are a variety of issues with the development and use of the transmission line and the pipeline, this section focuses on the main difficulties posed by Central Asia.³¹⁷ The historical significance of the Asian crossroads, which connect Afghanistan to South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East, is being revived to play a bigger role in the region. Afghanistan is a key factor in putting the idea of regional connectivity into practice and creating frameworks for bilateral and multilateral engagements among various states. The ongoing TAPI, CASA-100, and TAPI-500 are just a few of the notable energy projects that were highlighted by global initiatives like the Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA, 2017).

4.5.1 Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Gas Line Project (TAPI)

TAPI is a gas line project between South and central Asia, which pass through Afghanistan from central Asia towards South Asia.³¹⁸ It's also known as the peace pipeline between the region and also abroad.³¹⁹ The TAPI gas pipeline is a crucial part of the agenda of interested countries. Because it took so long to progress from the planning stage to the building stage, the TAPI gas

³¹⁶ - Danila Bochkarev, *Afghanistan Reconnected: Linking Energy Supplies to Consumers in Asia*, The East West Institute, 11 East 26th Street, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10010 U.S.A. +1-212-824-4100, March, 2, 2014 ³⁰⁰ -

³¹⁷ - Farkhod Aminjonov, *Afghanistan's energy security Tracing Central Asian countries, contribution*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung political foundation,

³¹⁸ - ³¹⁸ - *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RECCA Annual Review (Kabul, 2016), 11.*

³¹⁹ - Amina Khan, *TRANS-NATIONAL TRADE WITH FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN*, Strategic Studies , Winter 2007, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 81-108 Published by: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad Stable URL:

<http://www.jstor.com/stable/45242420>

pipeline has been on the agenda of the interested parties since the beginning of the 1990s.³²⁰ A regional gas transportation initiative that includes is the TAPI project. The idea of gas transmission from CAR to SA country gained major attention and finally, Asian Development Bank (ADB) gain and it was received in 2003 ADB support TAPI India and Pakistan joined in 2008. The pipeline is expected to provide 33 billion cubic meter of natural gas annually to Pakistan and India during the following three decades.

The 1,814-kilometer-long TAPI project will construct gas pipes, 814 of which would run through Afghanistan. They will begin in Turkmenistan and traverse through the vital provinces of Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Helmand, and Kandahar. The town of Fazilka in India, which is close to the Pakistani border, would be the pipeline's eventual destination. Afghanistan will receive \$400 million from TAPI per year. One of the principal regional initiatives of the Afghan government is the TAPI pipeline. Due to its fragile economy, Afghanistan plans to set aside 0.5 billion m³ of its 33 billion m³ amount of gas for domestic usage.³²¹ It will open up job prospects, make infrastructure development easier, and open the door to local production. Additionally, stepwise, Afghanistan will get benefits from this trans regional project as it will get 500 million cubic meters for the first twenty years and 1.5 billion cubic meters in the third ten years from the pipeline. India and Pakistan will be able to fulfill their gas demands and encourage business and industry³²² through this.

³²⁰ - Farkhod Aminjonov, Afghanistan's energy security Tracing Central Asian countries, contribution, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung political foundation,

³²¹ - Ibid

³²² - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies, Volume 2 Issue1, Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

4.5.2 Central Asia and South Asia 1000 (CASA 1000)

CASA 1000 is the electrical power project between the South and Central Asia. On the basis of this project, South Asia will gain immense benefits from vast energy resources on a mutual advantage basis during summer. The CASA-1000 project will facilitate power transmission from CA to SA, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are all involved. There is a lot of potential for promoting regional stability and development with the CASA-1000 transmission line.³²³ It will produce 1300 MW of electricity, of which 1000 MW would be sent to Pakistan and 300 MW to Afghanistan. The yearly transit expenses for the transmission of electricity via Afghanistan might reach US\$45 million. The World Bank and United States EIB, are funding an idea to export power from the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan (CASA-1000). In order to address its own power constraints, Afghanistan will also import 300 MW of electricity through this project.³²⁴ This project, which will cost US\$1.17 billion, should be finished in 2018.³²⁵ Additionally, it would create a significant framework for South and Central Asian economic and energy cooperation. The nations in the area can foster the confidence necessary to resolve other thorny issues, such trans-boundary water sharing, in a more positive way by cooperating more closely.³²⁶

³²³ - Reference Document For Session 5 of the Senior Officials' Meeting June 2019, Energy Sector Progress Report and Work Plan (June 2018–May 2019), Senior Officials' Meeting Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation 27–28 June 2018 Tashkent, Uzbekistan, carecprogram.org was first indexed by Google more than 10 years ago <https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/Energy-Sector-Progress-Report-and-Work-Plan-2018-2019.pdf>

³²⁴ - IMF Country Report No. 17/378, Selected Issues, *ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN*, December 2017, Copies of this report are available to the public from International Monetary Fund • Publication Services PO Box 92780 • Washington, D.C. 20090 E-mail: publications@imf.org Web: <http://www.imf.org>

³²⁵ - CASA-1000 Project Launched, Pakistan to get 1,000 MW by 2018," News, May 12, 2016.

³²⁶ - Nate Bills, "Powering a New Silk Road: Helping Connect Supply with Demand in South and Central Asia," Frontlines, November/December, 2014.

4.5.3 Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (TAP-500 KV)

Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan TAP-500 is a 500 kV power transmission energy network/project that connects Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. In order to ease power shortages in both countries, the project's objective is to carry electricity from Afghanistan to Pakistan.³²⁷ The TAP power interconnection project illustrates the three countries' aim for peace, stability, and economic growth in addition to fortifying ties and facilitating energy trade between them.

The three countries' current power infrastructure used in the power trade, which will also promote cooperation by making new transmission investments. The project includes the construction of a 500-kilometer, 500-kilovolt transmission line connecting Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. Once completed, the project will allow Turkmenistan to supply up to 4,000 megawatts of electricity to Pakistan and Afghanistan.³²⁸ Three countries allegedly signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in December 2015, according to Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS). TAP-500 is a sizable project with a 1,700-megawatt power capacity that will eventually be enlarged to 4000 megawatts. After CASA-1000, this is a sizable project in which the three countries are connected by electricity to boost their economies, attract more investment, and illuminate people's homes who lack access to power in their own countries.

³²⁷ - Masom Jan Masomy, *Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities*, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies, Volume 2 Issue1, Date of publication: 02 May 2021 April-May 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSS.2021.2113>.

³²⁸ - Asian development bank (ADB), *Power Interconnection Project to Strengthen Power Trade Between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan* <https://www.adb.org/news/power-interconnection-project-strengthen-power-trade-betweenafghanistanturkmenistan-pakistan>

4.5.4 Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan (TUTAP)

For transmitting energy from CAR to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the TUTAP project proposes to upgrade the domestic infrastructure of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, a unified national grid will be built as part of the TUTAP project, allowing for more flexible and effective electricity transmission. While the TUTAP will concentrate on improving Afghanistan's energy infrastructure, the CASA-1000 will provide the country with a new source of electricity.

Pakistan would be able to import power from Central Asia through improved Afghan infrastructure.³²⁹ TUTAP was established as a first step toward the development of a regional energy market in order to promote power trade involving Central Asian and South Asian countries. The project is intended to address the energy needs of the northern, eastern, and southern regions of Afghanistan while also aiding in the country's reconstruction.³³⁰ With funding from the Asian Development Bank, the project is carried out under the CAREC program (Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation). Currently, 220-kilovolt power lines have been installed linking Afghanistan's energy infrastructure with that of Tajikistan (2011) and Uzbekistan (2009). There are 1500 GWh and 650 GWh worth of power exported each year, respectively. In Afghanistan, work on a 500 kV electricity line and substations connecting PuliKhumri and Kabul has started.³³¹ Overall, TUTAP is advantageous to Afghanistan since it not only resolves the issue of energy

³²⁹ - Afghanistan: Addendum to the Afghanistan Power Sector Master Plan, Asian Development Bank, November 2014.

³³⁰ - Mekhdiev E.T. (2018) *Regional integration in Central Asia in the energy sector*, Teorii i problemy politicheskikh issledovaniy [Theories and Problems of Political Studies], 7 (1A), pp. 103.

³³¹ - Mekhdiev E.T. (2018) *Regional integration in Central Asia in the energy sector*, Teorii i problemy politicheskikh issledovaniy [Theories and Problems of Political Studies], 7 (1A), pp. 103.

supply but also strengthens its position as a transit nation, which promotes socioeconomic development. In turn, the selling of power benefits Central Asian nations.³³²

4.5.6 Afghanistan Tajikistan Gas Pipeline (ATGP)

The Afghanistan-Tajikistan Gas Pipeline (ATGP) is intended to transport extra gas from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. There is a bilateral agreement, but it needs to be approved by both parties in order to be signed. The Afghan government is committed to the success of the ATGP and has suggested setting up a technical panel to talk about a feasibility study for the project.³³³

4.6 Framework of Regional and International Engagement

Regional economic cooperation is one of the key signs of regional connectivity. Governments might be able to persuade them to participate if they understood how important regional economic cooperation is to the expansion of regional trade. The impact of regional initiatives on the development of each member state's economy must be carefully taken into account.³³⁴ Due to its geographical location within the three major Asian regions of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, Afghanistan is nearly entirely included in all regional integration organizations and regional projects. In order to increase its regional activities, encourage business development, and grow its economy, Afghanistan has participated in the majority of regional organizations and projects.

4.7 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

Afghanistan is a member of SCO. This organization has the ability to be involved in Afghanistan both as a member and an observer state. The aims of this organization is to address the

³³² - Ibid

³³³ - Ibid

³³⁴ - Middlebrook, Peter & Waissi, Wahid & Stacey, Jeff & Ponzio, Richard, (2015), Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan - The Silk Road through Afghanistan.

instability and insecurity situation in Afghanistan. SCO approved the Convention on Counter Terrorism in June 2009. Afghanistan has been a Special Invitee to SCO meetings since 2004, and during the Beijing summit in June 2012, it given observer status. The SCO member nations are only prepared to cooperate on an individual basis and mostly on economic problems. Organized crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism are others of its interests. According to the Astana summit in June 2011, which called for an independent, secure, and neutral Afghanistan, peace and security in that country will have an impact on both the surrounding area and the world. The SCO has concentrated on security concerns in Afghanistan since 2005, paying particular attention to challenges with terrorism, drug control, and organized crime. The five nations of SCO have both economic and security concerns and this explains the organization's keen interest in the Afghan mess, because the majority of SCO partner and observer nations are in a special position to contribute to Afghanistan's development. The following crucial areas in Afghanistan are where the SCO as a whole can contribute and work together.³³⁵

In order to transform Afghan nation into a regional connectivity actor for commerce and economic collaboration, the SCO can collaborate on specific initiatives that are beneficial to both parties. The majority of SCO members and observer nations may work together to make Afghanistan a crossroads for commerce and travel among the CA, WA and SA. If a territorial nation can improve routes action plan for the development of new transportation network and restore the old Silk Road connectivity under the SCO framework, it will increase the important effects. The CARs and other nearby nations stand to gain if Afghanistan's prospects as a regional connectivity actor are realized. This will significantly aid Afghan nation's economic connectivity

³³⁵ - Smruti S. Pattanaik, Afghanistan and Its Neighborhood, In Search of a Stable Future, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)

with the zone. It can aid in the construction of regional energy corridors as part of trans regional development initiatives. However, there are no regional frameworks in place to manage the political and security issues associated with energy cooperation. The SCO offers a forum for these discussions for both energy producers and consumers.³³⁶

4.8 Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA)

After the desolation of the Taliban regime and the beginning of economic struggle, one of the biggest achievements for Afghanistan the regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan in 2005, after the emerged of RECCA cross border economic cooperation increased RECCA had served as the foundation for economic cooperation confidence building, and activities in CA, S Africa, and Southwest Asia, as well as ministerial meetings in member states.³³⁷ RECCA was established to concentrate on economic cooperation among the five Central Asian countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran since Afghanistan was split among other regional trade groups. Outside of the regional energy framework, a focus on trade transit, organic components, and governance would create considerable economic and employment benefits for all regional nations, especially China, India, Russia, and the GCC.³³⁸

³³⁶ - Meena Singh Roy (2010) *Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Afghanistan: Scope and Limitations*, Strategic Analysis, 34:4, 545-561, DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2010.483149 To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2010.483149>

³³⁷ - Said Haroon Fakhri Zada, (Case Study: RECCA), *The Impact of Regional Economic Projects on Business Development in Afghanistan*, International Research Journal of Human Resource and Social Sciences ISSN(O): (2349-4085) ISSN(P): (2394-4218) Impact Factor 5.414 Volume 7, Issue 05, May 2020 Website- www.aarf.asia, Email : editoraarf@gmail.com

³³⁸ - Middlebrook, Peter & Waissi, Wahid & Stacey, Jeff & Ponzio, Richard, (2015), *Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan - The Silk Road through Afghanistan*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282308591_Regional_Economic_Cooperation_Conference_on_Afghanistan_-_The_Silk_Road_through_Afghanistan.

Megaprojects have already been listed at RECCA conferences, most of which will take longer to mature and are unlikely to be funded in the current climate. This will be a great chance for Afghanistan's near and far neighbors to assess the results of RECCA VI in Kabul. The meeting, which will feature a number of side events, will give participant countries a chance to discuss obstacles and funding requirements for priority projects in the vital sectors of energy transportation networks, trade and transit facilitation, communications, business-to-business cooperation, and labor support.³³⁹

4.9 Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)

The "Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process" (HoA-IP), which has been in existence for ten years, was created at a summit held in Istanbul in 2011. Since 2011, the Heart of Asia Process (HoA-IP), on regional stability and collaboration for a saved and Stable Afghan nation, has brought together regional stakeholders to focus on existence issues and problems with a focus on Afghanistan, and the dangers posed by the escalating presence and power of non-state actors. The Istanbul Process does have a lot of potential since it addresses political obstacles to successful regional collaboration as well as economic and security concerns.³⁴⁰ This program seeks to improve regional security, economic cooperation, and political relations with Afghanistan via dialogue and credibility.³⁴¹

The Heart of Asia Process should more closely connect the interests of donors and member countries and enable scaling up within the framework of this cooperative effort, which started with

³³⁹ - The Diplomat is an international online news magazine covering politics, society, and culture in the IndoPacific region. It is based in Washington, D.C. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/afghan-led-recca-and-heart-of-asiaprocesses-can-bolster-regional-stability-and-prosperity/>

³⁴⁰ - Study on Security Cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region, July 18, 2016, The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to "improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia.

³⁴¹ - carecprogram.org was first indexed by Google more than 10 years ago

<https://www.carecprogram.org/?feature=tokyo-declaration-regional-cooperation-afghanistan-development>

cooperation to confront common threats such as terrorism, drugs, poverty, and extremism. The ability of non-state actors to network and cooperate across political boundaries along with language, social, and educational divides is one of the crucial factors that has contributed to their success. Governments have struggled to collaborate and network effectively, and they haven't been able to keep up with the rate of change. The (HoA-IP) has been a key component of regional cooperation since its inception because of its participation in constructive conversation and its ability to address present and future regional concerns through local engagement with Afghanistan.³⁴²

A Heart of Asia Market Access Strategy must improve bilateral market access between Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia while also raising demand for Afghanistan's goods and markets. Afghanistan has the ability to act as a crossroads for Asia, and strong ties to Asia are crucial for Afghanistan's development.³⁴³ The Heart of Asia program spans 15 nations geographically: Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates. With a combined geographic area of more than 40 million km², it is one of the largest regional organizations in the world, accounting for around 27 percent of the planet's land surface. In short, all nations in the area benefit from a stable Afghanistan.³⁴⁴

4.10 Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), founded in 1966, included Afghanistan as one of its original members. Conversations between the ADB and the Afghan government ceased from

³⁴² - Ibid

³⁴³ - eurasian-research.org was first indexed by Google in November 2014
<https://www.eurasianresearch.org/publication/heart-of-asia-istanbul-process/>

³⁴⁴ -Ibid

1989 to 2002. The ADB and its improvement partners support the Afghan National Growth Strategy (ANDS), with its aspirational goals and benchmarks for gauging success in the country's reconstruction and growth.³⁴⁵

According to the ADB's development cooperation strategy (CPS), which approved from 2009 to 2013, the bank will continue to place a strong emphasis on Afghanistan's government, agriculture, and natural resources as well as its energy, transportation, and communications systems. According to the ADB's Second Governance and Anti-Corruption Action Plan³⁴⁶, support for these sectors will include the development of capabilities and institutions as well as attention to sector governance, with a focus on public financial management, procurement, and anticorruption. ADB has focused on energy, road and rail transport, irrigation, and agriculture over the past ten years through projects and programmer that sponsored by loans and grants as well as the accompanying technical assistance³⁴⁷. The Afghan government's urgent demands for reform and rehabilitation have been met in large part by these initiatives and packages. ADB has provided additional assistance to the nation's financial and governmental sectors. In order to spur the expansion of Afghanistan's banking and telecom sectors, support from the personal region has in particular been in the shape of loans and deposits. In addition, ADB has approved a \$165 million allocation for the construction of a railway line connecting Central Asia with Mazar-e- Sharif in Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan and Tajikistan³⁴⁸. Additionally, the ADB has given a go-ahead for a \$165 million supply to be used for the expansion of a railway line that connects central Asia with Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

³⁴⁵ - Relief Web is a humanitarian information portal founded in 1996. The portal now hosts more than 720,000 humanitarian situation reports, press releases, evaluations, guidelines, assessments, maps and info graphic http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDF_181.pdf

³⁴⁶ -ibid

³⁴⁷ - Ibid

³⁴⁸ - think-asia.org was first indexed by Google in June 2016.

Afghanistan is an essential participant in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program since its land is situated at the meeting point of Central and South Asia. There may be advantages to closer collaboration between Afghanistan and its neighbors. However, due to its position, the ADB will endeavour to maximise Afghanistan's potential as a cross-regional transit factor for each. Additionally, the CAREC's trade facilitation initiatives will increase regional trade and open up new commercial prospects for regional companies.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ - The Asian Development Bank is a regional development bank to promote social and economic development in Asia. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/371531/cps-afg-2017-2021.pdf>

Conclusion

Vital geographical location and the rich mineral, natural and energy resources enables Afghanistan for opening new economic opportunities such as transit and trade routes from central Asia towards South Asia's markets of energy. It is because this scenario (regional and international) gives benefits to all the regional and international community, along with Afghanistan itself. From a strategic point of view, Afghanistan has always remained very valuable. It leads to India and Persia in the east and west respectively, along with the wealth of the Middle East due to its easiness and simplicity in getting into Central Asia. Apart from that, the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan in the area focuses on the historical overview of Afghanistan from its old situations to the present ones.

The country has a great and vast history of decentralization and resistance to the world powers and foreign invasions on different occasions, while it acted as a natural corridor for foreign invaders, conquerors, and traders. For instance, the confluence of many civilizations, for instance, Rome, Greece, Iran, India, and China have been seen by this region, while in the 14th Century BC, the mark of Alexander the Great has been left by him. This region was ruled by Northern India, then Islam invaded in the 7th century AD after the death of Alexander the Great. Before Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism played a great role over there. Before the Mongols destroyed the city of Herat in 1222, it was supposed to be the area of a million people. Herat, like Bactra, is referenced in the Avesta, along with it being the capital of the Achaemenid satrapy of Aeria. Consequently, a Pushtoon, Durrani Ahmad Shah, became powerful enough and was titled as a king in the mid of the eighteenth century, when he nominated both Peshawar and Kandahar as capitals for winter and summer respectively. He is buried in Kandahar. Subsequently, Afghanistan enjoyed its unique

geostrategic position and played a vital role in international politics, as great powers tried to use the region for hegemonic agendas.

Also, it remained a buffer zone while the great game and war between the British and USSR continued. In order to survive, the Afghan people needed to acquire extraordinary creativity and cunningness. In 1836, Peshawar and its surrounding areas were annexed by the British. When they invaded Afghanistan in 1838, they installed their persons of choice on the throne in Kandahar. Moreover, the cooperation between Afghanistan and the Central Asian States, including the use of Afghanistan as a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia will be stalled most likely by the enhanced insecurities. As such, in the past four decades, Afghanistan suffered a lot as compared to other invading countries.

The country's economic infrastructure and socio-political situation were not only destroyed during the wars, but the division between many ethnic and political-religious groups enhanced and widened the wars. When the war with the USSR ended, the Afghan Taliban made their government and strengthened the other rival jihadi groups in Afghanistan. Due to religious parallelism and bonding, they were more welcoming towards Pakistan, and then, policymakers in Pakistan came up with the policy and idea of strategic depth against its much larger adversary, India.

However, the Taliban government in Kabul ended in less than a decade due to the shift in global politics after 9/11. After the end of the Taliban government, the US installed a new government under the umbrella of democracy. As a consequence, due to the huge unrest, high level of instability, corruption, and non-acceptance of legitimacy of Afghanistan's government by many groups, the Taliban in particular, the political conflicts in Afghanistan remained unsettled since 2001, and the US and NATO troops faced a high level of resistance from the Taliban.

Subsequently, after the withdrawal of US allies' troops in 2014, as they opposed the US policy, China shifted its focus to the Belt and Road Initiative, for which there was a need for a stable Afghanistan. So, in order to fill the gap left by US allies' troops, the regional and neighboring countries needed to interfere and possibly make Afghanistan more peaceful and stable. In addition to that, due to the fear of the possibility of another civil war after US withdrawal, as Afghanistan's government had no overall control over the whole country, while on the other hand, Russia also wanted to join the CPEC, in order to get access to the warm water, so intra-Afghan dialogues have been geared up. In conclusion, due to the fact that after the collapse of the USSR, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India would be obvious markets within reach with significant demand for energy due to the high trend towards the high and greater connectivity in between South Asia and Central Asia. In addition to domestic reforms of the energy markets, in order to enhance the economy at a national level for a growing population, more external energy supplies would be needed in these countries.

Throughout the entire area, the role of economic diplomacy as well as the economy were mentioned and highlighted for the near future of the entire region. Moreover, trade within South Asia has remained stagnant and the proximity between the center and South Asia has not averaged so far due to the fact that Asia is emerging as the new center of gravity, along with trade between South Asia and the rest of the world. Similarly, the lack of investment by foreign investors in Afghanistan means that the promotion of the bilateral energy trade between Afghanistan and the multilateral energy trade of Central and South Asia would, of course, benefit all the stakeholders in several ways. Apart from that, it would also enable the Central Asian power/gas utilities to use and take advantage fully of their assets. Also, it would enable the Central Asian States to enhance their export revenues, thus enhancing the sector viability, and also cover thermal power imports from the

neighbors in the medium term. While, in the longer term, economic growth would stimulate energy trade. As to Afghanistan, energy trade and transit would help stabilize the power system, give more access to electricity to the population, and upgrade its power system for transit purposes. There was a consensus that enhanced regional energy trade would contribute to the broader objectives of economic cooperation and political stabilization in the region. This will require high level political commitment in the region. Private investors will have to get involved to finance, construct, and operate the transnational facilities. International organizations and financial institutions offer instruments for risk mitigation.

Regarding Afghanistan, energy trade and transit would help to upgrade its power system for transit, stabilize the country's power system, and increase the population's access to electricity. There was agreement that increased regional energy trade would support the region's larger goals of economic cooperation and political stability. High level political commitment will be necessary in the area for this. The transnational facilities will need to be financed, built, and operated by private investors. International organizations and financial institutions provide instruments for risk mitigation.

Findings:

- The geostrategic and geo-economics significance of Afghanistan has many prospects to redefine its role from a failed state into an economic transit state that will impact positively on economy and politics of the region and for Afghanistan too.

- The regional connectivity of Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon. Historically Afghanistan has played an active role in the regional and international trade and transit from BC to CE.
- The history of invasions and civilizations shows that Afghanistan has always been important and will remain significant to the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of the regions and the powerful actors.
- The current changing global and regional dynamics has many projects and initiatives as there are many options of regional connectivity and trade interdependence available that, if Afghanistan benefits from, will lead to the peace and security not only in Afghanistan but also for the region as well.
- The energy and transit projects of regional integration through Afghanistan will not only impact on Afghanistan's economic stability but also will foster facilitated economic activity among the regions.
- The most important analysis is that Afghanistan's internal and external challenges always remain a hurdle to its positive posture in IR and so restrict Afghanistan to utilize its resources and location.
- Security always remains the main dilemma in Afghanistan. Any energy, trade and transit projects are useless until Afghanistan addresses its security concerns from inside and outside threats.
- Law and Order is poor in Afghanistan which hinders any economic and political activity in the country.

- The social ills like smuggling, drug trafficking, corruption, violence, and ethnic and sectarian conflicts are pre-dominant in Afghanistan that facilitate external exploitation of its soil.
- Political frailty in the relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors specially (Pakistan and India) pose another obstacle to regional integration.
- The strengthening of economic and political ties with Afghanistan of its regional neighbors would have positive impacts on regional and international connectivity.

Recommendations:

This study's main goal is to showcase Afghanistan's potential and challenges for regional integration and to suggest the way forward for Afghanistan and the regional countries to attract long-term investment. Cross-cutting challenges in all economic sectors including the removal of challenges and obstacles and changes to the regulatory framework and policy for regional integration and connectivity is also needed for economic role of Afghanistan.

- At first, Afghanistan needs to address the challenges home and abroad that damage its character as a nation and restrict its role in the region.
- Afghanistan government should focus on maintaining political stability and legitimate government for creating a conducive environment for regional and international investors.
- The government of Afghanistan and regional players should take the efforts to adopt all regional trade and transit projects.

- The governments of south Asian countries, central Asia and Afghanistan should finalize the tripartite agreement of trade and transit to facilitate cross border trade.
- The Afghan Government should improve its control over northern cities to facilitate the regional trade with Central Asia.
- Tariff disparity in Afghanistan and Pakistan should be reduced to increase trade between south and central Asia.
- The regional governments such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and central Asian countries should establish economic trade zones on the border with Afghanistan to be autonomously managed by the business sector involved.
- The south Asian governments, Afghanistan, and Iran should agree on access to Afghanistan and to Central Asia via the ports of Chabahar, Gwadar and to the Indian border.
- The Afghan government should develop incentives for infrastructure investment to attract foreign direct investment in the construction of trans-Afghan roads and rail lines. Several funding options exist (mineral endowment and the regional infrastructure fund).
- The South Asian governments should extend the railway network to Afghanistan through Pakistan and Iran, if they wish to gain access to Central Asia.

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