

## Central Asia-Afghanistan Relations under the Shadows of Great Powers Politics

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**Abstract:** *Afghanistan and Central Asia occupies vital geo-strategic location on world map. Both are endowed with massive energy reserves. Historically, both have cordial relations and are cooperating with each others. There are many projects on which both are cooperating with each others' i.e. 670 meter bridge over Panj River, 1300 megawatt electricity project, a railway line and gas pipeline project etc. Both are highly concerned regarding the security of the region which would be needed after the withdrawal of NATO in 2014. In this regard role of three great powers China, Russia and United States would be crucial. All these three powers interests are similar and are related to energy security. These three powers are opposing each others on different grounds in the region. Basically, United States is a foreign actor while China and Russia are regional actors, who are more concerned about security of the region because any disturbance in this region also affects the internal environment. United States' interests in the region are more concerned about maintaining its influence over Central Asian states and Afghanistan. Russia is considering China as a threat in the region because rise of China is undermining Russian influence in the region. To counter US influence in the region China and Russia are using the forum of SCO along with other member states.*

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### I. Introduction

Asia has remained the playground of international interplay. It has suffered from the vestiges of the cold war syndrome and currently, burning in war against terrorism. Still it has to determine its actual identity and charter its destiny. There is absolutely no doubt that in Asia, both Central and South Asian region are vital along with others. In South Asian region Afghanistan occupies a unique position on the world map and seems as a bridge to Central Asia and entryway to South Asia. While Central Asia, has vital geostrategic location and sitting at the cross roads of Asia and Europe. Strategically, politically, culturally and geographically Afghanistan is a part of Central Asia, while Central Asia is a part of former Soviet Union. Central Asia and Afghanistan shares common borders as well as population of Central Asia shares common religion, language and ethnicity with the people of northern Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Central Asia and Afghanistan swap one another's ethnic communities like in Afghanistan largest ethnic groups are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras.<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan has border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan in north and Afghanistan is located in the South of these three Central Asian states which shares 2370 Km long border. On the other hand, Central Asia is located at the heart of the Eurasian continent and stretches from Caspian Sea in the West towards Tianshan Mountains in the East along with Hindukush Mountains in the South. Central Asian States are landlocked and covers four million square kilometers.<sup>4</sup>

These states are bound with their southern neighbor in the same ties of history, culture, ethnicity, language and politics. Both are also connected by flows of drug trafficking and militancy. Among all Afghanistan's neighbors internal security dynamics of Pakistan highly affect regional security.<sup>5</sup> Central Asia and Afghanistan occupies vital geo-strategic and geo-economics position in the world. Both control vast minerals and energy reserves which attract foreign interests. The driving force of conflicts in Central Asia and

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<sup>2</sup> Rasul Bakhsh Rais, "Afghanistan and the Regional Players", *Asian Survey*, Vol.33, No.9 (Sep., 1993), p. 919.

<sup>3</sup> Ijaz Khan, "Afghanistan: A Geopolitical Study", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No.2, 1998, p. 490.

<sup>4</sup> Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, Peace and Security in the Central Asian Region, in *Central Asia Regional Cooperation for Peace and Development*, eds. (Rawalpindi, Friends' publications, 1997), p. 83

<sup>5</sup> Central Asia and the Transition in Afghanistan, Committee on Foreign relations, (19 December 2011), Available at: [www.foreign.senate.gov/publications/download/central-asia-and-the-transition-in-afghanistan2+Central+Asia+and+the+Transition+in+Afghanistan&hl=en&gl=pk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESieOYYwSlbp3DUgrukeJWDIdTuZ4zvcHEjgN6XeN1EJzNCpIb4bmjeuxh65YNwN4ufRIIpVGXhX02bYjKGORZnZAXc-K8fq3bvU61wVBvh0QF2jDrTmVFzCfqa073QFRbj4P9S&sig=AHIEtbQl5CeQ2b7GDCHmcrd7ynewsh\\_JXQ](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/publications/download/central-asia-and-the-transition-in-afghanistan2+Central+Asia+and+the+Transition+in+Afghanistan&hl=en&gl=pk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESieOYYwSlbp3DUgrukeJWDIdTuZ4zvcHEjgN6XeN1EJzNCpIb4bmjeuxh65YNwN4ufRIIpVGXhX02bYjKGORZnZAXc-K8fq3bvU61wVBvh0QF2jDrTmVFzCfqa073QFRbj4P9S&sig=AHIEtbQl5CeQ2b7GDCHmcrd7ynewsh_JXQ). Access on 22-2-2013.

Afghanistan is their mind blowing wealth in form of oil and gas. Both are concentrated on mass of untapped wealth.

Afghanistan has its own strategic importance and it is a key to Central Asian States through which these states Afghanistan can be easily penetrated. Significance of both in international relations need no emphasis. Both are endowed with world's greatest natural reserves. Economies of Central Asia-Afghanistan and their neighbors cannot be furnished in isolation.



[http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Afghan\\_Silk\\_Road\\_conf\\_report\\_-\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Afghan_Silk_Road_conf_report_-_FULL.pdf)

### **Historical Settings**

Central Asia and Afghanistan have ancient time relations. Prior relations were developed during the period of Alexander. After his death Hindu kings ruled in Kabul and present day Uzbekistan was controlled from Bukhara. Laterally Genghis Khan arrived in this region in 1219 and clutched the region under his power. At the end of fourteenth century Tamerlane occupied largest part of the region. In 1507 Uzbeks emerged as a power in Central Asia and Heart was capital in Western Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

Ahmad Shah Abdali was the leader who carved Afghanistan as state in 1747 as a tribal confederacy. However, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan is generally considered as a real founder of Afghanistan as modern state.<sup>7</sup> Historically Emirate of Bukhara was the last link between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Strong economic, political, culture and social relations were transformed by Soviet Union with Afghanistan through Central Asia from 1917 to 1991. In 1953, when Mohammad Daoud Khan come into power he developed cordial relations with Soviet Union and more than two decades commercial and political relations were good. During that period Soviet provided massive economic and military aid to Afghanistan. This aid included redevelopment of infrastructure, industry, promotion of literacy through different programs and reforms related to women's

<sup>6</sup> Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Modern History*, (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education limited, 2002), P.4.

<sup>7</sup> Mahnaz Z. Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Political Users of Access in the Borderlands of Asia*,(London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, Publishers, 1989),P. 94

emancipation.<sup>8</sup> In later part of 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Game was played between Russia and Britain on the chessboard of Afghanistan and Central Asia. At that time Russian attempts to move forward towards the south was considered as a threat to the security of India. However, natural boundaries of Hindu Kush Mountains were considered major obstacle in Russian advancement towards British control India.<sup>9</sup> In 1973, President Daoud come into power through military coup and got Afghanistan out from Soviet control by diminishing communist sponsored government. This political change gave space to another military coup in 1978 which formed pro-Soviet government with the help of Moscow. In 1979, Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan by breaking all cannons of international law.<sup>10</sup>

During Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Central Asian states played vital role of spokes person of Red Army. After withdrawal of Soviet forces in Afghanistan when civil war like situation emerged and during Taliban period Central Asian states supported their different ethnic groups to form Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Therefore in that period, Uzbekistan developed friendly relations with Uzbek leader Dostum and Tajikistan developed with Ahmad Shah Massoud. The purpose behind the establishment of these relations is to create buffer zone against Pakistan backed Taliban because leaders of Central Asian states considered that their activities would increase insurgency in their countries also.<sup>11</sup> After incident of 9/11, United States intervened in Afghanistan and Central Asia becomes the hub of geostrategic calculations. In order to remove safe heavens of Al-Qaeda under the protection of Mullah Umar, United States established its military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

### Ethno-Political Diversity in Afghanistan

Ethnic Group	Sect	Political Inclination	Territory Under Control
Pakhtun (8 Million)	Sunni Hanafi; Small Shiite Component	Pro-Taliban Pro-Hizb-i-Islami Pro-Hizb-i-Islami (Hekmatyar) Pro-Warlords (Gul Agha Sherzai, Hazrat Ali, Padsha Khan Jadran) Pro-Harakat-i- Islami, Pro-Socialist factions, Pro-American	South, South-West, Central South-East (Farah, Nimruz, Halmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Ghor, Oruzgan, Ghazni, Paktia. Paktika Logra, Vardak, Parwan, Kabul, Khost, Ighman). Also settled as minority in areas dominated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Hazaras and Nusristanis.
Tajiks (4 million)	Sunni; Ismaili	Pro-Jamiat-i-Islami (Rabbani) Pro-various warlords (Ismail Khan, Ustad Atta, Qasim Fahim) Pro-Sitam-i-Milli	North, North-East, North Central (Heart, Badghis, Jawzjan, Sati- pal, Baghian). Also settled in Pakhtun and Uzbek dominates areas.
Hazaras (800,000)	Shiite; Ismaili	Pro-Hizb-i-Wahdat (Khalili) Pro-Socialist Factions Pro-American	Central (Bamian Kapsia). Also settled in Kabul (outskirts).
Turkments	Sunni	Peo-Mahaz-i-Milli) (Pir Gailani's faction)	North, bordering Turkmenistan (Takhar, Mzaar-i- Sharif).
Nuristanis (150,000)	Sunni	Self-imposed isolation	North-east (Badakhshan)

Source: Omar Farooq Zain, "From Conflict to Conflict", *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 59, No. 1, (January 2006). p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Marlene Laruelle, Sebastien Peyrouse and Vera Axonova, "The Afghanistan-Central Asia Relationship: What Role for EU?", *EUCAM*, (February 2013), p.6

<sup>9</sup> Mahnaz Z. Ispahani, "Roads and Rivals: The Political Users of Access in the Borderlands of Asia", (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, Publishers, 1989), P. 94

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia," *Peace Research Institute Oslo*, 2012, Available at: [http://file.prio.no/Publication\\_files/Prio/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20%282012%29%20Central%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan%20%28PRIO%20Paper%29.pdf](http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20%282012%29%20Central%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan%20%28PRIO%20Paper%29.pdf) Access on 5-3-2013.



### Central Asia and Afghanistan's Cooperation

In international politics, Central Asia and Afghanistan are enhancing their bilateral relations. Both are enhancing political relations which is providing basis for economic and security cooperation. In term of energy cooperation there are many electricity projects among different cities like Turkmenistan with Herat, Uzbekistan with Mazar-i-Sharif and Tajikistan with Kunduz. Moreover there are many others large scale projects those are under the stage of planning and some of them are completed those are giving benefits to both and are playing vital role in changing the economy of region. Along with these there are most significant projects which are as under:

**First:** In 2007, 670 meter bridge over Panj River was completed with the help of Indian engineers which connected Afghanistan with Tajikistan. United States and Norway financed \$38 million for this bridge. Other than this, some smaller bridges were constructed on the same river.

**Second:** With the assistance of Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and World Bank, 1300 megawatt electricity project is under construction. By 2013, with the cost of \$500 million this project will be completed which pass through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan across Afghanistan through Khyber Pass enter in Pakistan through Peshawar.

**Third:** Russia has proposed a railway line which link Afghanistan and Uzbekistan through Amu Darya River. Moreover China has also offered railway track between Afghanistan and Central Asia through Xinjiang for transfer of copper from Afghanistan.

**Fourth:** A gas pipeline project among Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan and India (TAPI) with the cost of 2 billion dollars is under review. This project will provide 99 million cubic meter gas to South Asian region on daily basis originated from Turkmenistan gas fields.<sup>12</sup>

**Fifth:** Russia has offered a transit route which link Europe to Afghanistan through railway track connects Termez, Uzbekistan with Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, through Amu Darya River. China is also offered building this track from Afghanistan to Xinjiang through Central Asia to transfer copper ore from Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these Central Asian states are playing vital role in shaping future of Afghanistan. These states are playing major role in the economic development of Afghanistan. Government of Kazakhstan is cooperating with Afghanistan's government in education sector and introducing long term programs for Afghan's students in different Kazakhstan's universities. Central Asian States are focusing on trade with Afghanistan through trade liberalization, which include the low non-tariff trade barriers, better regulatory regimes and focused on different measures for continue flow of trading goods, services as well as people alongside the borders.<sup>14</sup>

Through bilateral cooperation both are making their economic condition better. Moreover, both are strong in term of energy resources. Through Economic cooperation and foreign investment governments of Central Asia and Afghanistan should try to improve the living standard of common people. When a common man will be prosperous, he will participate wisely in the development of the country.

### Energy Cooperation

Energy cooperation between Central Asian states and Afghanistan is getting importance in many debates. In 2009, government of Uzbekistan was ready to provide continuous supply of electricity to Afghanistan which was a part of \$250 million project to utilize hydropower plants of Central Asia to send electricity southward.<sup>15</sup> Tajikistan is facing continue electricity shortages<sup>16</sup> which was controlled after the completion of Roghun hydroelectric dam.<sup>17</sup> In 1976, this dam started work but not fully complete due to shortage of money. Later in 2009, Iran emerged as biggest investor with some doubts.<sup>18</sup> After a year analysts

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<sup>12</sup> Afghanistan's other Neighbors: Iran, Central Asia and China, *The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies*, Conference Report, (July 24-26, 2008), pp.9-13.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Blank, "Central Asian Perspectives on Afghanistan after the US Withdrawal", *Afghanistan Regional Forum*, (November 2012) p.13

<sup>14</sup> Robert O. Blake, Martha Brill Olcott The Role of Central Asia in Afghanistan, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (12 July 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Pannier, "New Power Line Lights Up Afghan Capital," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 29, 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/New\\_Power\\_Line\\_Lights\\_Up\\_Afghan\\_Capital\\_/1742690.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/New_Power_Line_Lights_Up_Afghan_Capital_/1742690.html), Access on 23-2-2013.

<sup>16</sup> Farangis Najibullah, "Tajikistan: Energy Shortages, Extreme Cold Create Crisis Situation," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 13, 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079348.html>, Access on 23-2-2013.

<sup>17</sup> David Trilling, "Tajikistan: Rogun Dam a Hot Topic as Tajiks Make It through Another Winter of Shortages," *Eurasianet*, March 12, 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav031309f.shtml>. Access on 23-2-2013.

<sup>18</sup> Kambiz Arman, "Investing in Tunnel, Iran Nurtures Ambitions in Tajikistan," *Eurasianet*, July 31, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080103a.shtml>. Access on 23-2-2013.

were doubtful regarding the completion of dam and generation of electricity.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Uzbekistan showed negative concerns regarding the construction of dam which will affect environment and also affect cotton crops along Amu Darya River. Despite these challenges Tajikistan has proposed power supply line for Afghanistan. This took different shapes based on different proposals. Among them one was to construct transmission lines which pass from Roghun to Iran via Mazar-i-Sharif cross through Kunduz to Kabul to Jalalabad.<sup>20</sup>

In term of energy resources Afghanistan is a rich country. Central Asian states are cooperating with Afghanistan in different energy sectors. Afghanistan is a resource rich region, so there is opportunity for Central Asian states to make their political relations better with Afghan's government. When political relations will be good bilateral cooperation between both will increase in different sectors.

### **Security Concerns**

Afghanistan is posing great threat to peace and stability of Central Asian states. This instability started after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. After withdrawal civil war was started among different factions of the same freedom fighter who had started mutual struggle against foreign aggression. Neighboring countries of Afghanistan have strategic and economic interests in war tone society. Instability in Afghanistan on one side is affecting the economy of the state and on the other hand is affecting any regional cooperation for the support of conflict ridden economy. However this instability is preventing the utilization of the nearest routes from Central Asia to sea.<sup>21</sup>

Central Asian States' Security is highly concerned with the internal situation of Afghanistan. Post Cold War changes along with present war on terror have fundamentally vigilant the security of both in particular and region in general. However security of Asia is in transitional phases and cannot understand only in simple terms. Role of both is increasing in politics as well as security situation of Asia which is increasing considerably and deepening close linkages with the key Asian regional, economic, security and political dynamics.

Three Central Asian states those have borders with Afghanistan are facing physical challenges from Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is facing internal security challenges which are supported from outside the borders. Tajikistan is facing challenges of drug smuggling and militancy due to close border with Afghanistan. Similarly Turkmenistan is also facing same security threats but government of Turkmenistan remained neutral in all disputes. However, non-bordering countries Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are facing challenges of terrorism, extremism and militancy.<sup>22</sup>

These Central Asian states are participating in the rebuilding of Afghanistan in order to support their own economy. Stability in Afghanistan affects on the internal situation of neighboring states. Turkmenistan as a neighboring country wants stability in Afghanistan because stability in Afghanistan provides market for of gas through Pakistan and India via Afghanistan (TAP) which was abandoned in 1990s due to security problems. Role of Central Asian states is very vital role in shaping the future of Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares its border with six neighboring states which are Iran, Pakistan, China, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Basically neighboring states have two important concerns in Afghanistan which are posing security challenges to them. These threats are drug trafficking and extremism. Moreover these countries want withdrawal of United States and its allies from the region because it is threatening security environment of the region.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan are based on eliminating threats of insecurity which Central Asian states faced from Afghanistan. Afghanistan problem is a major security challenge for the nations of South and Central Asia whose economic progress and security situation is adversely affected by it.

### **Risks of Insecurity in Central Asia and Afghanistan after the Withdrawal of NATO Forces in 2014**

Presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan is threatening Afghanistan as well as disappointing Central Asian states. The war against terrorism brought these foreign forces in the region and created insecurity for all regional states. After the incident of 9/11, introduction of these foreign forces in Afghanistan as well as in two neighboring states Uzbekistan and Tajikistan disturbed local balance of power among these states.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Erica Marat, "Will Tajikistan Successfully Construct Rogun?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 17 (January 26, 2010), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=35955&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=53f927465](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35955&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=53f927465). Access on 23-2-2013.

<sup>20</sup> "ADB \$122 Million Grant to Bolster Tajikistan's Energy Security, Trade," Asian Development Bank, August 16, 2010, <http://www.adb.org/Media/Articles/2010/13301-tajikistan-energies-projects/>, Access on 26-2-2013.

<sup>21</sup> Makbool Ahmad Bhatti, op.cit., p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Kimmage, "Analysis: Kazakh Breakthrough on Uzbek Terror Case," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 15, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1055882.html>. Access on 27-2-2013.

<sup>23</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia: Living in Afghanistan's Shadow", *Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre*, (November 2009), p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Nabih Gul, Afghanistan and the Regional Security Scenario, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 59, No. 1, (January 2006), p.51

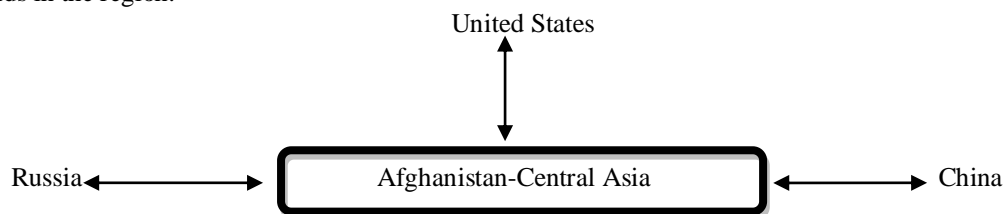
Announcement of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 is confusing Central Asian leaders regarding security situation of the region. Same situation was emerged after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1991 which created political vacuum. History is repeating itself and withdrawal of NATO is creating political vacuum and chaos in Afghanistan. These circumstances are creating security dilemma particularly for Central Asian states and bordering countries also.

Presently, Afghan forces are not well trained as well as well equipped for controlling the country after pull out of foreign forces. Currently, soldiers of Afghan army are belonged from different ethnic groups those have their problems with each others. After the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, it is expected that instability will increase more which will disturb not only Afghanistan itself but also the region. Due to this instability Afghanistan will again transform into a country which will provide safe haven to the enemies of US and the West to concentrate their forces. Therefore all regional countries should assist Afghanistan on its domestic security before the withdrawal.<sup>25</sup>

It is hard to calculate security damages for Central Asian states after withdrawal of NATO forces. Central Asian states are already facing high level of insecurity coming from Afghanistan's borders. After the withdrawal, weak Central Asian states i.e. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would be on the front of insecurity due to drug trafficking and other form of illegal border trade. Stability in Central Asian states and other bordering countries is highly concerned with the stability in Afghanistan. Any incident in Afghanistan highly disturb bordering as well as internal situation of these states.

### Great Powers Politics

Afghanistan and Central Asia as a region attracts great powers because they have rich mineral deposits. Presently, this region becomes the hub of great powers interplay and each power is using its own interests. Among great powers, three powers China, Russia and US are having conflict with each others in this region. Conflicting situation among regional powers emerged after the incident of 9/11, when United States as extra regional power invaded in Afghanistan on the name of terrorism. This invasion in Afghanistan disturbed not only regional balance of power but a clash was started among regional power and United States over interests on many grounds in the region.



\* The figure shows Great Powers those intercede in Afghanistan and also affect Central Asia.

Chinese interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan are cleared. In both, Chinese interests are related to energy security. In Afghanistan and Central Asian region, China is invested heavily in the development of infrastructure. While objectives of China's policy towards these states are to gain access towards the reserves of oil and gas.<sup>26</sup> Basically China did not adopt aggressive posture against any state in its foreign policy. Generally China's policy towards the world and particularly with Central Asia and Afghanistan is based on following five principles of peaceful existence;

1. Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Non-interference in internal affairs of other states.
4. Equality and mutual benefits.
5. Peaceful co-existence<sup>27</sup>

China being close neighbor of Central Asia and Afghanistan is keen interesting in the peace and stability of the region. China has massive investments in Central Asian region. Central Asian region is very vital for China because of vast resources of oil.<sup>28</sup> In Afghanistan, China's basic interests are related to improve security

<sup>25</sup> Leonid Gusev, "The US Interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia", *New Eastern Outlook* (4-3-2012)

<sup>26</sup> A. Khodzhaev, "The Central Asian Policy of the Peoples Republic of China", *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (February 2009), pp. 9-28.

<sup>27</sup> Sadia Tasleem, "China's Interest in Central Asia: Opportunities and Challenges", *National Development and Security*, Vol. XII, No. 4, (Summer 2004), p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

environment of the country because instability in Afghanistan greatly affects internal situation of China's Xinjiang region. Secondly, in order to fulfill its growing energy demand China wants to gain economic access towards the sources of Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup>

In Central Asia and Afghanistan, China has different policies instead of United States. China has no military intervention in Afghanistan while United States has a view point that China should provide military support to its mission in Afghanistan. However in Central Asian case, China is supporting them economically and politically while these states are also in the favor of China's increasing role. On the other hand, United States is militarily present in some of these states which is disturbing sentiments of local people and they are against United States' presence.

In compare with others China's policies towards Afghanistan and Central Asia are broadly divergent with Russian interests. Russia wants success of US forces in Afghanistan because immediate withdrawal of foreign troops will make the security situation more complex. In addition, Russia also wants complete eradication of Taliban in Afghanistan. While China is in the favor of Pakistan's backed Taliban and Karzai government in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, Soviet Union has its own interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Soviet Union has massive security and economic interests in Afghanistan as well as in Central Asia. Soviet Union invaded in Afghanistan with the objective to turn Afghanistan into Central Asian Republic and incorporated under Soviet sphere.<sup>31</sup> In contemporary international environment, Russia is establishing railway links as well as improving road infrastructure for getting energy resources from Central Asia. Russia is getting natural reserves through different forms like developing electric grids, hydroelectric stations, oil and gas pipelines and also capturing markets of Central Asian states. Russia is doing many bilateral agreements with Central Asian states regarding energy reserves.<sup>32</sup>

China's presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia is challenging Russian position seriously in compare with United States. From last few decades United States is still considering Russia as its major competitor not China. In contrast Russia is participating with China in SCO along with other players limiting US role in the region. In this regard SCO held conference on Afghanistan in Moscow.<sup>33</sup>

Central Asia and Afghanistan are focal point of United States' foreign policy after terrorists attack on twin towers. These interests were renewed when Soviet Union invaded in Afghanistan. At that time, United States prepared Mujahideen with the help of Pakistan against Soviet invasion. In December 1991, when Soviet Union was withdrawn from Afghanistan, US gave special consideration to this region. US activities began soon after the recognition of six Central Asian states in 1992. US introduced many programs and these programs were appreciated by Central Asian states.

In 2001, United States invaded in Afghanistan on the name of terrorism. In order to counter terrorism US deployed its troops in Afghanistan. On one hand this invasion provided an opportunity to major powers to play crucial role in Afghanistan. While on the other hand United States invasion in Afghanistan threatened security situation of the region in general and Russia and China in particular.<sup>34</sup>

From geo-economic point of view United States wants to redirect oil of Central Asian states from Chinese markets towards Washington. United States' militarily presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan is to counter Russian traditional presence as well as China rise because US sees them as main strategic rivals. On the other hand, United States' forces are present in Central Asia due to control or monitor the activities of Russian and China and keep their strong military foothold. Moreover United States presence in Central Asia is to operate their bases in Uzbekistan and increase their usage of Kazakhstan's air base to hold their activities in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup>

Three great powers of present times are interested in the resources of both Central Asia and Afghanistan. They are developing cordial relations with both and the objectives of their policies is to secure oil, gas as well as other resources of energy. Focal point of all these powers' policy is same. In current international

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<sup>29</sup> Jaff Reeves, Does China's Afghan Foreign Policy Constitute a Grand Strategy? Defense Concepts, Vol. 5, ed.4, p.24.

<sup>30</sup> Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, "Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?", Report, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2010). p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Meirav Mishali-Ram, "Afghanistan: A Legacy of Violence? Internal and External Factors of the Enduring Violent Conflict", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, no. 3, (2008), p. 476.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory Gleason, Reuel R. Hanks, Yury Bosin, "Afghanistan Reconstruction in Regional Perspective", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No.3, (September 2009) pp, 278-280.

<sup>33</sup> Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, "Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?", Report, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2010).pp.77-78.

<sup>34</sup> Meirav Mishali-Ram, "Afghanistan: A Legacy of Violence? Internal and External Factors of the Enduring Violent Conflict", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, no. 3, (2008), p 477.

<sup>35</sup> Leonid Gusev, "The US Interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia", *New Eastern Outlook* (4-3-2012)



environment, rise of China is disturbing US hegemony in the world. United States is doing his best efforts to contain China and disturbing his position in resource rich areas. In Central Asia and Afghanistan, Russia is facing same kind of challenge from China and US presence. Russia is trying to make dependent these states for trade and other raw material on her but US and China's influence in the region is disturbing his position. China and Russia is sharing their borders with both Central Asian and Afghanistan. Both powers are trying to developing peace in their bordering areas. Both are facing threat of terrorism and insurgency generated from Central Asia and Afghanistan. They are investing massively to develop the infrastructure of both nations. They are doing effort to eliminate safe heavens of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in these areas.

Sino-Russian interests were really disturbed due to long term presence of US in the region. China and Russia are not alone but there are also other traditional rivals those are more concerned regarding long term presence of United States at doorstep. China and Russia along with other member states are using forum of SCO to counter US activities in the region. China and Russia along with other regional powers are trying to focus on different policy options to exist from this situation. All these regional states are more concerned from the situation which will appear after withdrawal of United States in 2014. They are more concerned about the security situation which will appear after withdrawal.

### **Post 2014 Russia, China and US engagement**

After departure of foreign forces, Moscow first priority will be to focus on those areas which are very crucial from security viewpoint and domestic development. In security Moscow first priority would be fighting against drug trafficking which is passed from Afghanistan and Central Asia to Moscow. In term of energy development Russia priority would be promotion of greater regional cooperation in major areas such as transport, electricity and hydrocarbons. Regarding Soviet's post 2014 role in economic development of the region there are certain uncertainties because elites are skeptical about it.<sup>36</sup> Same in the sense, experts are confused regarding China stance on post 2014 role in the region. China's positive role in energy sector is appreciated but also criticized due targeting only minerals and hydrocarbons. In term of security Central Asian states are afraid of China's role on ground. Discussion on results of SCO's role in Central Asia and Afghanistan are very limited. On ground level it is failed to coordinate among member states. At the regional level it is only involved in fight against Uyghur extremism and suspected terrorists activities.<sup>37</sup>

Third and most vital player United States has signed Strategic Partnership agreement with Kabul regarding its presence in different forms from the period 2014-2024. After 2014, US priorities would divert towards other regions for energy reserves i.e Asia Pacific and Greater Middle East. It is expected that US would maintain its military presence in some Central Asian states. It is questionable the purpose of US military presence whether this presence will be for security related or for economic interests.<sup>38</sup>

From security point of view Central Asia and Afghanistan are not satisfied regarding China, Russia and US post 2014 security perspective. These are expecting more aid from external players to meet security demands. They want material support not in form of training; they want help not long term presence. Western aid should be without any political threats attached and from China and Russia without geopolitical ones. Afghanistan and Central Asian States are disappointed from major actors in preparing for the post 2014 security situation.

## **II. Conclusion**

In sum, presently region is in very complex situation because of different conflicts and divergent interests. Central Asia and Afghanistan are very rich in term of resources but are very weak politically. Since their independence, both are facing foreign intervention in one or other shape. Both share many common values and intervention of any power in Afghanistan also disturbs Central Asia. Among many similarities, people of both have common religion which is uniting them in spite of clear borders. When a foreign invader attack on Afghanistan, people of these states resist against any intervention.

Current complexion or divergence over interests in the region was linked to the incident of twin towers. Three powers have their own interests in the region and they are disturbing one another by using different means. All these powers are using the strategy of investment in both with the purpose to get politically support of these states' government. At the time, United States is super power, China is rising economically and Russia is also a power. So in order to support or maintain their status, these powers need massive energy reserves. For their interests, these powers are using different strategies. Along with this they are disturbing one another by creating different conflicting situation. United States interests are related to energy and it wants to maintain its

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<sup>36</sup> A. Matveeva, 'Selective Engagement: Russia's Future Role in Central Asia', *Central Asia Policy Papers* 3, July 2012.

<sup>37</sup> A. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense", January 2012, available at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf). Access on 27-2-2013.



influence in this region through its presence in Central Asian states. While China and Russia interests are generally concerned with energy reserves but particularly both are concerned with security environment of the region.

All these powers are struggling for their own interests and no one is focusing on the sentiments of local people. Common man is against any foreign intervention because this thing greatly disturb their sentiments and they want to run the county himself without any foreign dictation. Political leaders of these great powers should understand this thing and participate positively in the development of these states by formulating common instead of divergent interests.