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Role of the United Nations in India-Kazakhstan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

Afghanistan has been a political and economic challenge since the launch of war on terror (WOT) by USA. Despite efforts made in the direction of democratisation by United Nations and billions of dollars poured into the country, it has not succeeded much in achieving political stability. It still faces challenges of terrorism, religious fundamentalism, tribalism and serious problems like widespread electoral corruption and drug trafficking. The country is therefore a regional security problem to its neighbourhood. Both India and Kazakhstan are part of that neighbourhood. India has made inroads into Afghanistan through its developmental projects and foreign investments. Kazakhstan also has stakes in Afghanistan. Firstly, it is because any instability in its neighbourhood, particularly in Afghanistan, is likely to have ripple effects in Kazakhstan. Secondly, the country has already invested in Afghanistan. It has allocated millions of dollars on social security projects in country. Emergency assistance in the form of food worth millions of dollars have been sent. Developmental initiatives like training of Afghan students in Kazakh universities have also been started. All these sound similar to the kind of role that India is playing-developmental and reconstructive in nature. However, Afghanistan creates a situation that presents both challenges and opportunities to Indo-Kazakhstan cooperation. The challenges that lie ahead are because of their differing positions on Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's stability and China's increasing presence in the country (Kazakhstan). But at the same time, Afghanistan also presents an opportunity to further develop cooperation and coordination on not just an issue of regional security but also on international terrorism.

Keywords: India, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, political stability, regional security, religious fundamentalism, terrorism

1. India, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan Relation

The bilateral relations between India and Kazakhstan have been growing successfully and dynamically over the last few years. When President Nazarbayev visited India as the Chief Guest at the 60th Republic Day celebration in January 2009, it imparted a significant impetus to the bilateral engagement. That visit proved to be instrumental in upgrading bilateral relations to the level of Strategic Partnership. Eventually many path-breaking Agreements in the areas of oil exploration, civil nuclear energy, space etc. were signed. The President also met the Chief Executives of several public and private sector companies of India representing areas like thermal power, healthcare, petrochemicals, IT, tourism, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, agriculture, food processing etc. which present immense potential for strengthening and diversifying bilateral economic relations. Significant progress has taken place in several of these areas over the years (Sajjanhar: 2010).

Interaction in United Nation and other international forum has been cordial between these two countries. Kazakhstan supported not only India's seat for Permanent Membership in Security Council but it also smoothen the India's entry as an observer in Shanghai Cooperation Organization. India participation in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) process¹, initiated by Kazakhstan, has been constructive and active ever since its inception. India also supports Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions². Kazakh foreign policy's another initiative. As far as WTO membership is concerned, Russia and Kazakhstan were in the threshold of becoming members and WTO membership would not stand in the way of international trade between India and Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan sharing its boundary with China is located between Russia and Asia, bears its importance to India both geographically and politically. The factors which are responsible for making important for both the countries are firstly, its located in geostrategic position; secondly, it has multi-ethnic and secular structure; thirdly, economically particularly its energy reserves. This undoubtedly makes this country of strategically important. Kazakhstan lies between northeast of the Caspian Sea region, with the Russian Federation in the northern region, China in the eastern region, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the southern region. The geographically located position of Kazakhstan makes it important for India, although they does not share border with each other. Further, it is important to note here that before 9/11 attack the Central Asian states are being tilted either towards Russia or China.

¹ Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, Annual Report, 2013-14.

² Internet sources: [online web]: <http://www.kazembassy.com>

Then, after the September 11 attack, American also made an entry in the region. However, India is concerned as far as; it shares cordial relations with Central Asian Republics, the US and Russia. As India is going to become one of the top 5 consumer of energy. To ensure regular and better energy supply, it is important for India (being an energy deficit country), to have cordial ties with the Kazakhstan owing to its huge energy reserves.

The third factor being Kazakhstan secular and democratic structure being multi ethnic and multi religious bears resemblance to Indian society also makes it important for India.

Although, Muslim radicalism exists in Kazakhstan but it has never gained popularity or supremacy. The strong religious feeling is confined to the southern strip of the country. Being Secular the Kazakhstan government do not support or propagate any sort of political Islam. Kazakhstan has shown interest in India's diversity, pluralism and political democracy. They also consider that bilateral cooperation can be instrumental in combating terrorism in the two nations (Singh Roy: 2002).

Afghanistan has been a politically unstable country. The independence of Afghanistan in 1919 created a power vacuum. By 1970, country started facing series of revolts. In the wake of civil war between pro and anti communist, two opposing blocks Soviet and United States entered the war. One block support the communist forces and another block provide support to Talibans or Mujahideen. Finally, the conflicted resulted in the death of millions of Afghans. The removal of Soviets from the country allowed various fundamentalist and extremist groups to assume power.

Subsequently during mid 1990s, an extremist group, Taliban assume power over the country. It imposed Shariat law. Subsequently, Afghanistan become the centre of terrorism during which an extremist, Osama Bin Laden became the leader of the organization. It is alleged that he fought against the Soviets and also conspired the attack against the United States in 2000.³In the meantime, the instability in the region between Afghanistan and Pakistan also affected India's security. In 1999, Indian Airlines flight IC-814 departing from Kathmandu was hijacked by terrorist and was landed in Kandahar of Afghanistan. The hostages were later released in exchange for three terrorists held by Indian governments. In addition to that, various Pakistan-supported terrorist groups active in Kashmir, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad underwent military training in Afghan alongside Central Asia military groups such as the IMU, Tajik and Uighur Militants. The 2008's "terror attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul was sanctioned and monitored by senior officials of Pakistan's ISI (Times of India 2008)".

Afghanistan assumes a special position among the Central Asian States. Its stability both politically and economically is essential as it form a trade junction. Afghanistan acts as a middle point between for the formation of New Silk Road between South and Central Asia. The Central Asian states has been increasing the trade flow to and through from Afghanistan. The trade generates the revenue for the country such as transportation fees and custom duties. The revival of proposed natural gas pipeline ((TAPI pipeline) from Central Asia and the importance of Afghanistan is discussed in the report "Development in Key Sectors." The threat from Taliban causes many Central Asian States to join the Shanghais Cooperation Organization with Russia and China in 1996. It is during this period that Kazakhstan proved its value and allowed the use of its airbases for the military operations in Afghanistan. Further, Kazakhstan was the first country in 2011 among the Central Asian states to provide its forces in Afghanistan.

Although Kazakhstan does not share border with Afghanistan, it considers itself became as a key economic partner for Kabul. Afghanistan has an Assistance Programmed for the Reconstruction. "The Programme consists of projects related to water supply, infrastructure growth and the delivery of cement and manufacture supplies. Astana has financed the reconstruction of the Kunduz-Talukan road and the structure of a school and a hospital, costs a total of \$2 million. In 2002, more importantly, as its exports began to take off, Kazakhstan emerged as a most important actor in Afghanistan's wheat market. Today, Afghanistan imports about 20 per cent of flour come from Kazakhstan, and for the period of the years when Pakistani banned real exports, Kazakhstan is one of the country that the main supplier of wheat to Afghanistan's"⁴.

India and Kazakhstan, having agreed on their joint interest and cooperation towards stabilising political situation in Asia, have started working together through dialogue and support for stability. Their joint efforts have been to combat drug trafficking in Afghanistan through helping the Afghan government to in institution building for eliminating such problems. In 2002 a historic joint memorandum was signed by them to establish partnership between defence industries of these countries. Kazakhstan has received support from India for developing a naval fleet in the Caspian Sea, although there has been strong opposition from Russia. During Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to India in January 2009 and a civil nuclear pact on uranium supply for atomic plants in India affirmed the partnership between the two countries. This is said to be a vital phase if India- Kazakhstan strategic partnership. This is an exemplary precedence of the confidence in India and Kazakhstan cooperating to reach out to each other's needs.

2. India, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan within the UN

The United Nations (UN) is founded in 1945 after the 2nd World War by 51 countries. The organization is based on the ideal of "maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights (Afghanistan Peace building 2016)".

In 2nd March 1992 (GA resolution 46/224) the newly independent republic Kazakhstan has become a member of the United Nations. Whereas India which joined in October 1945, even before attaining independence from the Britain was one of the founding members

³Daniel Vermilya, The War in Afghanistan: Causes, Timeline &Controversy, Chapter 8/Lesson 5Transcript, <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-war-in-afghanistan-causes-timeline-controversy.html>

⁴USDA Foreign Agriculture Service, '2012 Grain and Feed Annual Afghanistan', GAIN Report, Global Agricultural Information Network, 24 March 2012, available at: http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/2012%20Grain%20and%20Feed%20Annual%20_Kabul_Afghanistan_3-12-2012.pdf.

among the 51 member states. Since the very beginning India has been vocal in the international organization regarding the issues of the then third world countries. By 1946, India had started to draw attention towards colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination. In early 1993, United Nations system begins its country-based operations in Kazakhstan. After the end of an agreement between President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev and then Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali on 5th October 1992. Afghanistan became a member of the UN in 1946. Before political turmoil erupted in the country many United Nations agencies were actively engaged in the country, such as United Nations Development Programmed (UNDP) which continued to provide its support to “develop local capacity and provide Afghan solutions for Afghanistan⁵”. However United Nation had to decrease their humanitarian and developmental activities inside Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion.⁶

Nevertheless, the UN became instrumental or played a key role in Soviet departure from Afghanistan(Geneva Accord of 1989). After that in Afghanistan the United Nation continued a political operation through OSGAP (Office of Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Pakistan), which was succeeded in 1996 by UNSMA (United Nations Special Mission for Afghanistan). On the other hand, UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance for Afghanistan) did supervise an important humanitarian programmed, executed by UN agencies. This consist of coordination through Regional Coordination Boards (RCBs) based within Afghanistan and an Islamabad based Afghan Programming Board (APB), and annual facilitation of a Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP).

“The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), under the control of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Lakhdar Brahimi, was established in March 2002. It aimed at implementing the Bonn Agreement on the political transition in Afghanistan. It also assisted in the relief, recovery and reconstruction of the country. The SRSG is provided with an overall authority by the UN Secretary-General to provide 'directive coordination' to all UN programmers and agencies operating (Afghanistan Peace building 2016)” in Afghanistan⁷.

The United Nation system started its country-based operations in Kazakhstan in early 1993 after the conclusion of an agreement between President Nazarbayev and then Secretary-General of the UN Boutros Boutros-Ghali on 5thOctober 1992.Over the years, the UN Agencies have give major support to Kazakhstan. They supported the drafting of a wide number of strategies, programmes and legislation dealing with macro-economic reform, social issues, improvement of health and environmental management. The most important of them is the long-term development strategy Kazakhstan 2030. The UN Agencies also carried out pilots and projects at local level.

3. Conclusion

India and Kazakhstan have common interest in bringing political and economic stability in Afghanistan as that directly affects the security of both the countries. In this regard, both the countries have followed a similar approach of complementing UN presence with developmental projects and assistance. The challenge however still lies in Kazakhstan’s accommodation of Pakistan’s position in Afghanistan in order to prevent situation from deteriorating further as former is seen as unavoidable actor in the country. Developmental initiatives like training of Afghan students in Kazakh universities have also been started. All these sound similar to the kind of role that India is playing-developmental and reconstructive in nature. However, Afghanistan creates a situation that presents both challenges and opportunities to Indo-Kazakhs cooperation. The challenges that lie ahead are because of their differing positions on Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan’s stability and China’s increasing presence in the country(Kazakhstan). But at the same time, Afghanistan also presents an opportunity to further develop cooperation and coordination on not just an issue of regional security but also on international terrorism.

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