

CHAPTER 3

ROLE OF SCO IN “WAR TORNED” AFGHANISTAN

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AFGANISTAN

Initially, there had been no concept of Afghanistan in the same way as the central Asian region but a pathway for different empires. The region of Afghanistan has been geographically situated in the central and south Asian regions, which mainly consists of mountains and barren land. The region was initially ruled by the Babylonian empire around 500 B.C then by alexander, the great in 329. The region was conquered by several kingdoms like Arabs, Turks, Chinese, Mongols, and Greeks. The old silk route which had been formed by the Han dynasty around 130 B.C also passed through Afghanistan. The dynasty rule had a very great imprint on the culture and religion of the region. The Arabs brought Islam to Afghanistan in the 7th century however; it got popularized in the 11th century. The region had been also heavily influenced by Persian culture due to the Genghis khan empire, which ruled the region from the 12th century. The establishment of Genghis khan’s Mongol empire led to the pacification of the region and -established the silk route that connected China to Europe. During Mongol rule, the region was divided into different Khanates however this system ended after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The identity of Afghanistan came into existence after the establishment of the Durrani Empire in 1747. The Durrani Empire which was established by Ahmad Shah Durrani separated its borders with Mongol and Persian empires and started its autonomous rule in Afghanistan and took an aggressive stance against the regional empires

3.2 Anglo –Russian War and ‘The Great Game’

In the 19th century, the rivalry between the Russian empire and Britain erupts regarding the hold of the Afghanistan region due to its geostrategic importance as Russia wanted its direct access to hot water harbors such as the black sea and a reach to the Mediterranean Sea. Russia also knew the natural resource-rich region, its agricultural land, and its animal breeding region. There had been another strategic importance for Russia, as it would get direct access to the Indian Ocean region and to get control of major seaports. In the same period, Britain took control of the Indian subcontinent and started expanding its empire. Britain had faced several setbacks by losing its colonies and it was suspicious about the intentions of Russia regarding their approach in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The central Asian region was crucial for Britain as it had immense natural resources and hence Britain wanted to take control of it. The main significance for Britain regarding Afghanistan was its trade and commerce passing through Afghanistan and it wanted it as an undisputed route for its trade. The tussle between Russia and Britain came to an end in 1907 where both the parties agreed by signing “Anglo Russian convention” where they agreed to make Afghanistan as buffer states between the two empires.

The struggle between the two powers led to the decline and depreciation of the Durrani empire as both Russia and Britain fought three Anglo-Russian wars to install their puppets on the crown and to get benefits from them. These reasons led to the political and military decay of Afghanistan.

3.3 Afghanistan from 1919-1947

In 1919 the king Amanullah khan established the sovereign and independent state of Afghanistan and started establishing relations with the international community. During this period Afghanistan started making modern reforms behind reforms the main leader was Mahmud Tarzi who fought for the education of girls, abolition of slavery, and burka. He also started coeducation for the students in the country however, these changes were

not liked by tribal and religious leaders. This whole scenario led to the armed rebellion and Amanullah Khan was forced to leave the crown. The rebel leader Habibullah Kalakani took over the charge in January 1929, but this dominance had not been sustained as in November 1929 the cousin of Amanullah Khan, Prince Mohammed Nadir Shah took back the charge from rebel leaders. The prince tried gradual reformation rather than an abrupt change in the country. He was assassinated in 1933 by a student from Hazara School. The Zahir Shah son of Nadir Shah who was 19 years old at that time succeeded the throne. Zahir Shah continued his rule by appointing his uncle as prime minister in 1946, but his uncle provided greater political freedom in the country however when he evaluated the consequences of such freedom, he took back the decision. In 1953, the cousin of Prince Daoud Khan replaced the prime minister and tried closer ties with the Soviet Union and distance from Pakistan. The reason for the distant relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan was as Britain left the Indian subcontinent India got divided into two parts which were Pakistan and India. The borderline that had been formed between erstwhile India and Afghanistan in the 19th century was the Durand Line but after the formation of Pakistan in 1947, Afghanistan opposed the line as it divides its Pashtun tribe. The Pashtun resides in mainly Afghanistan but in Pakistan territory too. The relation between the two sides started hostile and both sides started a trade blockade which resulted in the economic crises for Afghanistan.

3.4 Cold War and Afghanistan:

After the 1947 and starting of the cold war, Afghanistan took a neutral stance by not aligning to any block but in the wake of the trade blockade between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Afghanistan needed support to tackle the situation and hence it shifted towards the Soviet Union for trade and training of its military officers. During this period, America had no enmity or ill will against Afghanistan but as the cold war started and the relations between the two blocks deteriorated the relation with Afghanistan too changed with both the superpowers. Initially, Afghanistan demanded military support from America against Pakistan but America denied it though it promised to cooperate on

infrastructure projects like making dams, roads, schools, power plants, etc. America also provided technical assistance for the economic growth of Afghanistan however; America provided military aid to Pakistan, which led to the closer ties of Afghanistan with the Soviet Union.

The Afghanistan government tried to balance the relationship between two power blocks because in Afghanistan in this regards the Prime Minister Daoud Khan signed an agreement with US president Dwight Eisenhower in 1953. The personal relations between Daoud Khan and Eisenhower also helped to manage the relationship between the two nations. The reason for this friendship or relation could be traced from the 1950s Cuban revolution where the Soviet Union was supporting Fidel Castro in the neighboring country of US hence America tried to balance the game by supporting Afghanistan this would help to check on the Soviet Union and stopping Afghanistan from becoming a communist state. Afghanistan had some other goals for friendly relations with the US, as it was suspicious about the intention of the Soviet Union as Afghanistan was scared of Soviet invasion and needed modern weapons to fight against the neighboring threats. Russia was very eager to control Afghanistan as it had several goals and the advantage of the geostrategic location of Afghanistan. The main objective was to stop America from forming an Anti-Soviet sentiment state in its neighborhood. The other factor was to control the Iranian coal fields and have a check on Iran.

The Soviet Union also wanted to dominate the South Asian region and if it would lose Afghanistan control, it would be a major setback for the Soviet Union in the Persian Gulf as well as in the Indian Ocean region. In 1956 the Soviet Union agrees to help Afghanistan and both the nations became close allies. As the Cuban revolution was going on the Soviet Union tightened its grip over Afghanistan too. But in Daoud Khan got relied upon the Soviet Union for aid and assistance and mass resentment led to his resignation for his overdependence on the Soviet Union in 1963. In 1964 new legislature was formed and a new constitution was enacted in Afghanistan which stated the nation would be ruled on a constitutional monarchy basis. In 1964, it was drafted that the executive would be answerable to two chambers of the legislature. In 1965, the Afghanistan communist

party came into existence with the support of the Soviet Union. The main leaders of the communist party were Babrak karna and Nur Muhammad Taraki. The elections were held in 1965 and 1969 but they did not work well. In 1973, the former prime minister of Afghanistan Daoud khan took the control of Afghanistan and declared Afghanistan a republic. Daoud khan wanted to distant Afghanistan from the Soviet Union and closer ties with western countries. However, he was not able to sustain power and in 1978 was overthrown by the people's party of Afghanistan and the banner party both were leftist and pro-soviet which was a pro-soviet party and in 1979 Hufizullah Amin became the president of Afghanistan and Noor Muhammad Taraki became the prime minister. During this time equal rights for women were introduced and the land got redistribute. The actions took by the communist party were not following the soviet norms and were against the will of the Soviet Union.

3.5 Afghanistan War and the Soviet Union

In the initial days of 1979, thousand of political leaders were arrested and killed by the Afghanistan government; around 27000 peoples were executed by the government. By April however, the situation started deteriorating and the rebellion started in the whole country. In September 1979 the killing of President Nur Taraki who had been alleged that he had been killed by Deputy Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin worsen the situation in the country. USSR failed in pacifying the situation. The USSR was committed to not enter in Afghanistan, but it had to change its decision of entering Afghanistan. The entry of the USSR had been the reason that Amin's leadership would lead to the instability of the region. However, the situation worsened, and USSR entered Afghanistan in December and Amin got assassinated by USSR troops. The pro-soviet barback caramel was installed as president of Afghanistan in 1980. The Soviet Union was not interested in fighting a war but to stabilize the situation, as the conditions changed, and the local sentiment changed from pro-soviet to Anti-Soviet the USSR had no option but to enter into a full-scale domestic war. The international community condemned the action of the

Soviet invasion and demanded immediate withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan unconditionally. The United Nations assembly passed a resolution by 104-18 votes against the soviet. The international community viewed this act as the ‘new great game’ through which the Soviet Union wanted to gain direct access to the Indian Ocean. This act was seen as a violation of the “Yalta Agreement” of 1945, which stated that states must be given to decide their future and make self-determination of their policies to more specifically European states.

The reaction of the international community could be evaluated through different perspectives. the first and foremost had been of America which viewed the intervention as ‘a great threat to world peace’. The then-president of America jimmy carter stated that the act has been done under the shadow of regional harmony. *“The US also viewed it as the expansionist tendency of the USSR and one of Carter’s final foreign policy decisions was to announce that an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”*¹⁷

An Overview, to contain USSR the US formed ‘rapid deployment force’ for a quick reaction against USSR in the Persian Gulf and they started secretly signing the deal with gulf countries to get access to logistics and bases in case of war. The action taken by USSR in Afghanistan made the Islamic nations angry including its Warsaw pact allies. The other country, which had been concerned for obvious reason, was Pakistan. Afghanistan had a severe impact on the politics of Pakistan. Pakistan supported the Mujahidin’s by providing military training and financial aid through assistance from the US. The ISI and CIA conducted several operations against USSR in Afghanistan. The chief reason for Pakistan to support the Anti-Soviet agenda was that it feared that If DRA would be formed after stabilization it would directly revive its claim over ‘Pushtunistan’. Pakistan also viewed this as an opportunity for the installation of the pro-Pakistani

¹⁷ Hughes, G. (2008). The Soviet–Afghan War, 1978–1989: An Overview. *Defence Studies*, 8(3), 326-350.

regime in Afghanistan. The other benefit was that Pakistan had the opportunity the lifting sanctions imposed by the US over Pakistan's nuclear program.

3.6 SCO And Afghanistan

SCO had some serious concerns regarding the Afghanistan issue from its formation. The Afghanistan problem had a serious threat to the stability of the region, as it had been the main source of illegal trafficking of drugs and terrorist activities in the region. The narcotic supply had severely affected the people of the region and had been the chief financial source of terrorist, extremist and separatist forces in the region. All the neighboring countries had withstood the worst of the Afghanistan crisis. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had suffered the most due to the problem. Before the establishment of SCO, the 'Shanghai five' showed deep concern over Afghanistan however refrained from any action by declaring it as the internal issue of the nation. However, experts had expressed that before the establishment of SCO the 'shanghai five' was neither capable nor qualified to take initiative or action in Afghanistan. The shanghai five proposed a 6+2 approach in solving the problem through which it suggested that the six neighboring countries China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Pakistan, including the US and Russia must form a model to solve the afghan problem under the supervision of UN.

Figure 2: Map of Afghanistan



3.7 Formation of SCO and Afghanistan Crises:

After 9/11, the US declared ‘war on terror’ and entered Afghanistan for the eradication of terrorism. However, The SCO had also been formed from its raw state of ‘shanghai five’ in 2001. The member countries of SCO in central Asia perceived that the SCO is ineffective in solving the Afghanistan crisis and hence established relations with NATO allies for the regional security in the region. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan provided

military bases to NATO for the fight against terrorism. The interest of SCO member states in providing military assistance and logistic support to NATO showed the incapability or incredibility of SCO's role in regional security. Though SCO was not able to take firm actions in the Afghanistan issue it passively supported the developments done by NATO. They demanded firm actions against terrorism, which had been a big threat to the region. SCO showed great concern on the narcotic drug trade in the region, which had been the chief source of financial assistance to the terror groups in the region. The SCO welcomed the formation of the interim government of Afghanistan and Afghanistan national army in 2002.

The deteriorating condition of Afghanistan raised concerns for its neighbors too and Hence, the issue of Afghanistan was raised in the 2004 summit where all the members agreed to form 'SCO-Afghanistan contact group'. *"The ACG consists of permanent member states of the SCO secretariat, secretariat officers, and senior Afghan diplomats posted at the country's embassy in China. If required, representatives of other SCO bodies and experts of SCO member states and Afghanistan can be involved in the meetings of the ACG"*.

In the same summit, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai was also invited to the SCO meeting. The establishment of SCO-ACG took place in 2005, where it was agreed that it will be the channel through which dialogue and cooperation will take place in the future. The focus of the group was to minimize the narcotic drug trade in the region and counter-terrorist activities in the region. However, the chief agenda of the contact group was to strengthen the capability of Afghanistan and the formation of an 'Anti- Narcotic security belt' around Afghanistan. From 2005 to 2007 all, the member states stressed improving the political and economic condition of Afghanistan by working with other international organizations. The member states again evaluated the consequences of Afghanistan's narcotic supply in the region and focused on the demilitarization of Afghanistan. The member states also emphasized motivating and providing other alternates to the farmers for shifting from poppy to other crops. All the members emphasized the need for providing aid on the humanitarian ground like forming schools, hospitals, and other

infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. However, in 2008 Russia proposed a special session on Afghanistan that took place in 2009.

3.8 Special Session on Afghanistan:

The summit held in an SCO Special Conference on Afghanistan was held in March 2009 in Moscow. *“Besides the full members and the four observers, it was also attended by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and representatives from the group of Eight, the E.U., and OSCE. Altogether, 36 countries sent their foreign ministers to the Conference. Afghanistan was also represented by Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfer Spanta.¹⁸”*. Nevertheless, the main triumph of the event was that it played a vital role in bringing Iran and the US on the same stage, which proved the importance of SCO in regional as well as in global politics. Both the parties agreed to cooperate on the Afghanistan issue. In the summit, all the members focused on setting up anti-narcotic, anti-terrorist, and anti-money laundering belts around Afghanistan. All the members also agreed to assist Afghanistan agencies in countering terrorism and providing assistance in controlling drugs.

In the summit, SCO opposed the expansion of NATO forces in the Central Asian region but agreed to co-operate in Afghanistan by providing logistic support to the NATO forces. The summit also proved to be a shift in US stance in Afghanistan where it asserted that it would consult and cooperate with Afghanistan neighbors for stability. The Russia had allowed the NATO forces to use its territory for logistics support in Afghanistan, which are combat, as well as non-combat supply. The route through Russia had been safe and easy for transit of military supply for NATO forces. The gesture provided also provided a landmark shift in the policy of east and west regarding the global problem of terrorism and the role of SCO this act had been acknowledged by everyone. In the summit, the SCO and CSTO agreed to take part in joint counter-terrorism and anti-drug trafficking operations in the region.

¹⁸ Khan, S. (2009). Stabilization of Afghanistan: US-nato Regional Strategy and the Role of the SCO. In *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* (Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 11-15).

During the summit, all the concerned parties had different opinions and approaches regarding the Afghanistan problem where the neighboring country Iran criticized the role of western countries in the region and pled guilty for the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. They also stated that Islamic countries are more aware of the social fabric and have a more connected culture to Afghan people than western countries. They emphasized that Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Iran are collectively more capable of solving the Afghan problem and welcomed the initiatives taken by SCO.

Pakistan expressed that it has been capable of solving the Afghanistan issue with the support of the international community. It expressed its desire in joining RCTS to counter-terrorism in the region. Pakistan also emphasized cooperation between SCO and ECO for the development of Afghanistan and praised the role of Russia and China in Afghanistan. Russia expressed its concern over Pakistan as being a nuclear power that had been heading towards Talibanization and activates extremist groups in their territory and safe Heaven for terrorist groups of Afghanistan. However, after criticizing Pakistan Russia started engaging Pakistan in the Afghanistan issue where “the fourth round of bilateral consultations of the Pakistan-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism was held in Moscow in August 2009. Before this, there was a Russia-Tajikistan and Pakistan summit in Dushanbe in July 2009”. The above stance taken by Russia showed that the role of Pakistan could not be neglected if anyone wants to solve the Afghanistan problem.

The central Asian states had witnessed the color revolutions in the central Asian region, which had been backed by western countries hence the regional countries were shifting from pro-NATO to regional powers, which were Russia and China. The central Asian states had a very deep concern for Afghanistan as this region had a great economic and political impact on Central Asian states. The SCO agreed to the fact that the central Asian states have close ethnic and cultural links with Afghanistan, which can play a significant role in understanding the core problem of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan can play a crucial role in the establishment of industries of Afghanistan which were once had set up in the northern part of the country and Tajikistan can provide electricity and connectivity to the

nation. Kazakhstan emphasized. *“At the Moscow summit, its first deputy foreign minister, Murray Abykayev, suggested that the UN, NATO and such structures as the OIC and the ECO should be fully involved in resolving the Afghan problem and emphasized the need for creating reliable ‘zones of anti-terrorist, anti-drug and financial security’ around Afghanistan. He also considered it expedient to explore the possibility of full-scale NATO-SCO-CSTO cooperation.¹⁹”*

Afghanistan was given observer status in SCO in 2012 summit and after the declaration of withdrawal of NATO forces from the region, which had started in 2011 where 650 US personals left Afghanistan as declared by President Obama had left a great threat to the region as well as to the world. In NATO summit 2012, all members agreed to shift from active role to assisting role to Afghanistan forces and will leave the country by 2013. The consequences and change in dynamics in Afghanistan would be discussed in the next portion.

3.9 Afghanistan after the Withdrawal of NATO Forces:

The US had stated that it would withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan until 2014. However, in 2012 the NATO forces saw several attacks on NATO by Afghanistan forces, which were named, as ‘green on blue’ attacks. In the attacks, the NATO forces suspended all joint military operations with the Afghanistan army and police. The NATO handed over the complete security of Afghanistan to its military. The NATO forces stated that the Afghanistan army would take over the complete charge of the security of the nation where earlier it had been playing limited role. "Our security and defense forces will now be in the lead," Karzai said. *"From here, all security responsibility and all security leadership will be taken by our brave forces. When people see security has been transferred to Afghans, they support the army and police more than before²⁰”*. The NATO forces had started closing their bases and shipping out their equipment from

¹⁹ Roy, M. S. (2009). International and Regional Security Dynamics. *Indian and Iranian Perspectives*.

²⁰ Mankoff, J. (2013). *The United States and Central Asia after 2014*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Afghanistan. The NATO forces stated that the international security assistance force would continue to provide military assistance, training, and supporting role to Afghanistan forces but they will not take the lead role in counter-terrorism activities.

3.10 Role of SCO after the Withdrawal of NATO in Afghanistan:

SCO countries have a vital interest in Afghanistan, which can be noticed by the fact that Secretary-General of the SCO, Rashid Alimov in 2017 called it the ‘Heart of Asia and the SCO’. The importance of Afghanistan could be traced by its geostrategic location. First of all, before understanding the role of SCO in Afghanistan we have to understand the trajectory followed by SCO and Afghanistan. Afghanistan got the observer status in 2012 and it had applied for permanent membership in the SCO summit, at Ufa. During the summit, the chief executive of Afghanistan showed his interest in joining SCO by stating that economic convergence and regional cooperation could play a key role in the stabilization of the region. *“As Afghanistan applied for permanent membership of SCO China announced its support for the accession of Afghanistan at a meet between the National Security Advisor of Afghanistan, Mohammed Hanif Atmar, and China’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, in Beijing in 2016. China’s support for Afghanistan’s peace and reconciliation process was also mentioned by President Xi Jinping in his speech at the Astana Summit in 2017²¹”*. On 1 November 2019 in Tashkent, SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov met with Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Abdullah, During the SCO Heads of Government Council Meeting (SCO Secretary-General Meets with Chief Executive of Afghanistan, sectsco.org). In the summit, the SCO members provided a roadmap for an action plan of contact group where it was agreed to counter potential terror threats in the region and providing training and expertise to the Afghanistan officers in countering narcotic drug trafficking and aiding in infrastructure projects. During the meeting, it was discussed regional transport chains passing through Afghanistan could play a key role in the

²¹ Lalrinfel, B., & Tripathi, A. (2018). Afghanistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Prospects for Membership.

economic development of the nation and provide opportunities for the export of goods from Afghanistan. The Afghanistan chief executive Abdullah praised the actions taken by SCO in regional security and accelerating the economic cooperation with the nation.

The cooperation between SCO and Afghanistan has been on a limited basis since great regional or major powers try to increase. Their influence by cooperating bilaterally for their vested interests. The interests of the countries would be discussed later however; the SCO members have some benefits in dealing with the Afghanistan problem. The SCO had great opportunity and scope in dealing with the problem of Afghanistan.

3.11 Scope and Opportunity for SCO in Afghanistan

After the formation of SCO since 2001, it has been the sole organization in the Central Asian region that had been imparting security to its members without the involvement of the US. The SCO had cooperated and coordinated on several issues and provided a platform for its members to raise their issues related to regional security. The SCO has become the primary dispute solving mechanism or other disputes among its member states without the involvement of western countries. SCO has also contributed to counter insurgencies and Anti- Narcotic operations in the region that has been a trans-border threat. It has provided a regional platform for intelligence sharing on terrorism, extremism, and separatism through RATS. The member states' commitment regarding the regional threats could be well evaluated from its peace mission exercises done in past. The SCO has been the sole central regional organization that has the capability of bringing disparate states on a single platform irrespective of differences among them. It has also proved to be a juncture where the implementation of security-related policies is implemented uniformly by all members. The SCO has proved its mettle in reducing tensions among states that were hostile in the past.

The SCO has also prevented the power capitalization race in the region as both the great powers of the region Russia and china had shown their cooperation in the functioning of SCO. The SCO has provided a comprehensive approach in dealing with regional problems rather than focusing solely on their national interest, which has been tied to the

regional problems. It has also provided confidence-building measures among states and reduction of military forces on border areas among member states.

The SCO can be the guarantee for peace and stability of the Central Asian region and more specifically Afghanistan. The main reason for this has been the fact that all the neighbors of Afghanistan through which illegal narcotic supply takes place are the members of SCO. The issue which inspires its Central Asian neighbors is the fact that the development and stability of Afghanistan would ultimately result in the economic development of these states and would provide better connectivity and trade routes to them. The Central Asian state has close cultural and ethnic linkage with the Afghan people, which would help in resolving the issues among the people and also help in awareness programs. The ethnic and cultural ties would help in understanding the problems and challenges faced by Afghan people, where the NATO forces have failed to do so. The SCO also provides central Asian states the assistance and intelligence apparatus from more developed and modernized militaries. It also provides tactical training in dealing with Anti-Terrorist, Hostages Rescue, Anti-Smuggling operations where Russia, China, and India have many sophisticated and modernized approaches in dealing with these problems.

The SCO can help become a hub of economic activities for all SCO members due to its strategic location. If Afghanistan would be connected through South, West, and Central Asia. It would benefit all the countries for their energy supply and economic activities. Iran and all Central Asian states are rich in energy resources, which can be directly transported through Afghanistan to India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In the past, the TAPI pipeline project which passes from Afghanistan has proved the importance of Afghanistan. Hence; it can become a zone of interaction between energy producers and energy consumers.

The Central Asian states have an edge in dealing with the Afghanistan problem through SCO. The most important aspect of SCO for central Asian states is the fact that it provides political stability to their autocratic rule. In the past, during the color's

revolutions, the Central Asian states had become uneasy about the stance of western countries and the support of western countries to these revolutions had made suspicion regarding the intention of NATO forces in the region. While dealing with SCO, the Central Asian states feel comfortable in dealing with their internal problems. The ‘Shanghai Spirit’ has been enshrined. The SCO charter guarantees them that no member would intervene in the internal affairs of the country.

The other great power of the region, which has been investing heavily in Afghanistan, has several motives in solving Afghanistan crises through SCO. The first among them is the fact that after solving Afghanistan's issue the china would emerge in geopolitics as a regional power. However, the core issue is the fact that Afghanistan borders the Chinese most unstable and Uyghur Muslims populated Xinjiang province. The Uyghur terrorist groups have close links with the Taliban. Afghanistan has been a Launchpad for terror outfits in Xinjiang province. The Taliban has been a breeding ground for pan-Islamic ideology in the region hence; China wants to curb the influence of terrorist activities in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the question arises, why china would want to stabilize Afghanistan through SCO rather than acting unilaterally as it would get much weightage in global politics by solving it on its basis. The major cause of the multilateral approach is the fact that China is well aware of the fact that Afghanistan has been the ‘Graveyard of empires. The other factor being the Chinese army has been modernized but it lacks experience of wars.

China had some economical aspirations through Afghanistan. It has a vast presence of natural resources which can benefit China in its development. China is the biggest foreign investor in Afghanistan, having acquired the US\$4.4-billion extraction contract to develop the Mes Aynak copper field located in the province of Logar, winning the bid for oil exploration in the Amu Darya basin in northern Afghanistan, and developing extensive railway infrastructure in the country²². China has heavily invested in Afghanistan and hence, it wants to secure its investment in Afghanistan. China had been

²² Pandey, S. (2019). *Understanding China's Afghanistan policy: From calculated indifference to strategic engagement*. Observer Research Foundation.

failed in several projects run unilaterally and hence, it needs to collect approach in the smooth functioning of its projects in the region. The other factor being the Belt and Road initiative, which has been the most ambitious project of china, also known as the ‘new silk road’. The road does not pass through Afghanistan However, it has been earlier stated that the china Pakistan economic corridor could be extended to Afghanistan if the situation becomes stable in Afghanistan. All these events have a great impact on the strategy of china regarding the Afghanistan issue.

The other great power of the region which is Russia had ruled the Central Asian region with no match. The question arises that why Russia would work in Afghanistan under the umbrella of SCO rather than involving unilaterally. The most obvious reason is that Russia has ‘Afghanistan syndrome’. Where it had a beard the consequences by its humiliating defeat in 1989 hence, it never wants to involve unilaterally. The other reason is that Russia will never tolerate the presence of NATO, in its backyard where they had been the major threat to its regional dominance. Russia is well aware that instability in Afghanistan would ultimately result in the revival of the extremist Islamic group Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban has always been the biggest threat to Russia. The Taliban had provided shelter and training camps to Chechen rebels. The revival of the Taliban has a severe impact on all the regional countries hence; it demands collective efforts to stabilize the situation. The SCO can also play an important tool to end the presence of NATO in Afghanistan where it has used the organization during 2005 where SCO collectively demanded bounded time for withdrawal of NATO forces from the region.

The other concern for Russia is the drug supply and cultivation of poppy in Afghanistan. According to the UN, Russia consumes only slightly less heroin each year than does the rest of Europe combined (70 tons versus 88 tons). Out of about 100,000 drug addicts dying each year worldwide, between 30,000 and 40,000 are Russians. Russian officials point out that the production of narcotics in Afghanistan has grown exponentially 44

times²³ since the fall of the Taliban and the arrival of the coalition forces. They are genuinely worried²⁴ in the past; the SCO has cooperated in forming an ‘anti-drug security belt’ around Afghanistan which can assure anti-drug initiatives taken by Russia through SCO. If SCO takes the lead role after the withdrawal of NATO it can offer much to Russia as the presence of NATO forces has diminished the scope of investment Russia in Afghanistan. In terms of economic factors, Russia does not have much trade relations with Afghanistan however; it extracts some benefit from an Afghan natural resource.

Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan since 2001 were in a mess as Pakistan has provided shelter and assistance to terror groups of Afghanistan especially the Taliban and Hence, the other factor for Pakistan is that SCO can help in trust-building between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Pakistan and Afghanistan area, which has been the fertile ground for terrorists, could become an economic hub for the entire Asian region. Through SCO Pakistan can counter the separatist Baloch and Pashtun rebels which have their ties with Afghanistan terror outfits as SCO opposes the separatism and Hence, it can get a legitimize channel through which it can curb the separatist forces in its country. However, Pakistan has nothing much to offer on a multilateral platform like SCO due to its past track record while dealing with multilateral organizations like NATO.

Afghanistan has great importance for India due to its geostrategic location India. Afghanistan has a severe impact on India’s security concerns. The terrorist groups backed by Pakistan in Afghanistan had severely threatened the peace and stability of India since 1947. Politically and economically, Afghanistan is significant for India. The question that arises here is that why should India approach through SCO rather than bilaterally. This could be well understood from the declaration of ‘Central Asia policy’ which focuses on increasing political, cultural, and people-to-people connect with central Asian countries. The policy is based on ‘Commerce, Connectivity, Consular, and Community’. The main

²³ Cohen, A. (2014). How the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Will Affect Russia and Eurasia. *Central Asia After 2014*, 13-32.

²⁴ Trenin, D. V., & Malashenko, A. (2010). *Russia's restless frontier: the Chechnya factor in post-Soviet Russia*. Carnegie Endowment.

route for engagement with central Asian countries passes through Afghanistan since after the peace deal signed between the US and Taliban in 2020 had made a serious challenge to India's security and hence, India wants to neutralize the Anti-Indian stance of Taliban through SCO.

The economic perspective of India about Afghanistan very crucial for maintaining its development pace. It has been estimated that India would need to import 80 percent of energy needs since due to instability in the gulf region the central Asian region has immense potential to fulfill the energy demand of India. The Afghanistan stability would enable India to get access to the central Asian region and can establish new trade routes through Afghanistan. If trade routes would be developed under the SCO framework, the cooperation would prevail over hostility. In recent times the TAPI project had enabled Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan in providing energy security to some extent however, if the pipeline would be extended to other members like China, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, Pakistan would behave in a more accountable way in securing and guarding the multilateral projects.

All the countries of the Asian region as well as of the world have great concern for Afghanistan as it severely affects the global politics similarly India has been one of them as the Afghanistan issue affects the Indian security and hence India has a close eye over Afghanistan. India has always been trying in stabilization and reconstruction of war torned Afghanistan. India has been constantly investing in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. However, several times the progress had been derailed due to the conflict of India and Pakistan where the Pakistani state sponsored terrorist groups had deteriorated the security condition in Afghanistan. India has always focused and proposed the e importance of regional cooperation as it helps to resolve border issues. Before gaining the status of permanent member of SCO India did not have much to offer through multilateral channel but after gaining the permanent member status of SCO it can play key role in defining the trajectory of Afghanistan in collaboration with China and Russia.