

POTENTIAL ROLE OF REGIONAL PARTNERS IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION OF AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract:

The socio-economic situation of Afghanistan has been in shambles for almost two decades due to the U.S. invasion on the country. However, with the prospective end of this gruesome conflict, it is imperative to keep in sight and deliberate upon Afghanistan's socio-economic reconstruction which is a shared responsibility of regional countries. In this regard, it is needless to say that rebuilding of the country cannot be left alone to the cliffhanger of the interests and whims of the major world powers without regional support as was done in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal in late 1980s. The U.S. influence in South and Central Asia is declining in present times and thereby it has become necessary to evaluate the potential role of all the important regional countries around Afghanistan to ensure the rising of an era of long-lasting stability in Afghanistan. In this context, the role of regional countries and organizations, who are the real stake holders in the peace and development of the post-conflict Afghanistan is of paramount importance and carries great potential. Regional cooperation among the regional states and regional organizations for enhancing connectivity, academic collaboration, trade activities and transport corridors through Afghanistan will naturally translate into the socio-economic reconstruction of the war torn country.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Economic Reconstruction, Socio-economic Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Connectivity

Introduction:

On 11 September 2001, the world had witnessed the most horrendous and deadliest terrorist attacks on the U.S soil, which resulted in

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thousands of people's death. In the aftermath of this terrorist attack came the watershed moment that altered the history of the world when the USA and its allies attacked Afghanistan on 7th October 2001. The hastily planned invasion proved to be one of the most disastrous, counterproductive, and costly military expeditions. The daunting outcomes were experienced by Afghanistan and put profound implications on regional security also. Presently, due to the changing dynamics of regional economic and security discourse, there is a dire need on the part of immediate neighbors of Afghanistan and other regional countries to consider reconstruction in many domains of Afghanistan.

In this aspect, to end the long war, Pakistan and many other regional countries are playing a significant role in bringing peace to the region. With the systematic withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the peace efforts, on 29th February 2020 U.S and Taliban came into an agreement. The prospects for systematic socio-economic growth have started to emerge with the peace deal. Many countries in the region like China, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and prominent Central Asian states have started to weigh in on assimilating the Afghan government and people in the region's political and socio-economic activities.

Afghanistan, despite being landlocked, is at the crossroad of the Ancient Silk Route that connects East and West via land route. The route is still relevant and efficacious for expediting trade and commercial activities to foster regional integration and economic growth. Trade via the Afghan route can pave the way for sustainable economic development, increase job opportunities, create an efficient workforce, enhance people to people contacts and establish multiple options for future regional integration. This particular work attempts to discuss and analyze the most important requirements of socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, to highlight the decisive role of regional countries in the post-conflict, socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and to identify the prospects of regional integration and stability in the region via Afghanistan.

Significance and Novelty of the Study

This research explores the major requirements for the socio-economic reconstructing of Afghanistan and the potential role of regional partners and major stakeholders in facilitating the peace process and contributing to socio-economic development of Afghanistan through enhanced connectivity making Afghanistan a linking hub between Central and South Asia. This research also focuses on future cooperation among regional partners to enhance trade activities and people to people connections. This study will contribute further to the policy implementation process and highlight various patterns of cooperation among regional powers.

Research Methodology

The research approach used in the study is Deductive (top-down approach). This research is analytical as it based on content analysis and evaluation. The study is also descriptive and exploratory in nature because efforts have been made to describe and explore the potential role of regional powers and prospects for cooperation in the post-conflict Afghan situation. The sources of data collection are both primary and secondary. The primary sources used in this study are the diplomatic speeches, official sites, official reports and official statistic reports etc. The secondary sources are based on the relevant data collected from published research papers, magazines, articles, journals, newspaper editorials, and other authentic online sources. Thus through a descriptive-analytical approach the paper aims to answer three important questions such as what are the requirements for socio-economic reconstruction in Afghanistan? How best the regional states can play their roles in the post-conflict socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan? and how can prospects of regional integration be further enhanced to bring peace in the region and make Afghanistan a regional transit trade hub?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research can be best explained by the “complex interdependence” theory. The leading proponents of this theory were Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. The term ‘interdependence’ is frequently used in today global arena. It is a situation where states and all actors involved are associated and depended upon each other. Generally, dependence means a state of being determined or significantly affected by external forces. Interdependence, most simply defined, means mutual dependence.¹ In world politics, interdependence refers to conditions based on correlative impacts among actors or states. According to the authors, interdependence should not be defined entirely as situations of evenly balanced mutual dependence. However, in mutual dependence, the dynamics of relationship are different between the actors involved. The nature of the relation is amid states and other transnational actors. It is characterized by both cooperation and competition. In interdependence, there are costly reciprocal effects of transaction among the actors. One’s actors’ policies and actions have profound impacts on the policies and actions of the other actors and vice versa.

Under this theory, regional cooperation is significant at the multilateral level. The states cooperate even in the changing dynamics of regional or

¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (1978), “*Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*”, University of Wisconsin Press, 32(2) (Spring, 1978): 513-530.

global political and economic affairs. In this regard, the significant regional countries i.e., Pakistan, China, Russia and other Central Asian states, are the stakeholders in Afghan peace process. Furthermore, it is vital to understand that Afghanistan is the main trade route and transit hub between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs). Therefore, the peace and stability of the country would have ripple effects on the adjacent states. In present times, states are more inclined towards enhancing soft power tools. The world is no longer unilateral and it has become more multilateral. The multiplex world order calls for resolving global challenges with collective efforts and it is pertinent to jointly work for peace with development in the regional security discourse. Thus the complex or regional interdependence provides a positive sum-game for all parties involved leading to a win win situation.

Socio-Economic Reconstruction of Afghanistan: An Analysis of Requirements

Before discussing the role of regional partners in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, it is important to understand the guiding principles on which the reconstruction should be carried out. Following are some of the significant elements need to be taken into account in this regard.

a. Extensive Planning:

The regional countries adjacent to Afghanistan need to build unified, integrated and coordinated planning for the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction programs. The findings of these ongoing and future assessments will provide the needed impetus for an essential analytical baseline for prioritizing and enhancing cooperation between important regional players. In this aspect, increasing the involvement of Afghan people in such planning is essential.

b. Coordination:

The degree of coordination between the Afghanistan, the international community and particularly the regional countries and immediate neighbors of Afghanistan is likely to determine the involvement in different actions. The essential countries and organizations in this region have coordinated many meetings and plans for this purpose bilaterally, multilaterally and under the umbrella of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Economic Cooperation Organisation and Central Asian Economic Cooperation (CAREC). In this aspect the hard infrastructure projects involving Afghanistan need to be prioritized for accelerated implementation and the consultative meetings should be continued for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Furthermore, such activities which are detrimental to the peace process can be thwarted by consistent consultations and collaborations between the stakeholders vis-à-vis regional connectivity.

c. Training of Afghans: Capacity Building

Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, many Afghan professionals have either left the country; have been killed or silenced by their theocratic militant captors. The brain drain has almost paralyzed the country. Because of these circumstances, the local Afghan people must be trained by important regional countries in this region. The technical training and assistance should be based on modern technical and scientific footings to fill the contentious void that is hindering the reconstruction of their country. Capacity building is important to strengthen the institutions of Afghanistan in almost all the sectors of socio-economic life.

d. Funding:

The World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Asian Development Bank put the estimated future cost and accelerate implementation of infrastructure projects keeping the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan on board. The amount of non-security and non-humanitarian related needs over the next decade would be approximately \$15 billion. As per the other estimation, the range could be high up to \$25 billion.² In this context, effective coordination for meeting these monetary requirements should also be part of regional countries' agenda and must contribute as per their capacities.

Potential Role of Regional Partners in Reconstruction of Afghanistan:**Pakistan:**

Due to the poor conditions of social sectors in Afghanistan, its medical and education infrastructure and facilities have been shrinking rampantly during the past couple of decades. As an immediate neighbor, Pakistan always help and support the Afghan government and people with socio-economic reconstruction plans and trade activities. Such assistance help the Afghan government and people and also enable Pakistan to amicably repatriate huge number of Afghan refugees living in its jurisdiction for more than 40 years now. Furthermore, the continued cooperation and facilitation would also help bring peace in the regional political discourse and enhance integration among the countries. Pakistan has been playing a pivotal role in the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. The government has been supporting the Afghan government in building resilience and increasing cooperation in multiple sectors. The sectors include communication, economy, education, health, etc.

² "Post-Conflict Reconstruction." web.stanford.edu. Post-Conflict Reconstruction, n.d. Accessed March 9, 2021. <https://web.stanford.edu/class/intnlrel193/readings/week6/afghan.html>

In recent times, military means are subdued because of enhanced use of soft power. The avenues of soft power projection are gaining grounds. The states are more inclined towards projecting soft power avenues for cooperation. In this aspect, Pakistan's soft power policy has a primary objective to bring peace, regional cooperation and facilitate establishing a vibrant civil society in Afghanistan. This cooperation will pave the way for rooting out many issues including extremism, militancy and terrorism. After the U.S withdrawal from this country, increased cooperation will also change the nature of Pak-Afghan relations. Owing to these benefits of soft power, Pakistan has pursued strategies of cooperation and has significantly invested in capacity building and technical training programs in Afghanistan. It has pledged to continue doing so in the future.³

China:

China, as immediate neighbor of Afghanistan, has an important role to play in the socio-economic development of post US Afghanistan as it has concrete plans for regional and global integration such as BRI. During the last few years, China has approached its neighboring countries and has sought to consolidate friendly relations to promote regionalism through the policies of sustainable development leading to encompassing socio-economic improvement. The visionary incumbent Chinese President, Mr. Xi Jinping is an advocate of positive global and regional engagement. The grand vision of global alliance would subsequently contribute towards Chinese ascendancy. It is pursuing the long-term objectives of building a community with a shared future for shared prosperity.

Keeping these assertions in mind, it is no surprise that successive Chinese governments have reiterated plans to take Afghanistan as a strategic partner in their quest for expanding the socio-economic interests in the region and beyond. The visionary leadership has reiterated its commitment to bring peace, stability, and economic prosperity to Afghanistan through investment. The Chinese president has emphatically reiterated his speeches for "A new era of cooperation in China-Afghanistan relations to take development to a new depth and breadth".⁴

Afghanistan has answered positively and has backed the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The country undoubtedly lies in the center of regional and global trade. The Afghan government officials have persistently met Chinese government officials for seeking effective investments and engagement initiatives for its economic development. China has signed

³ Alamgir Khan and Muhammad Hanif. "Pakistan's Role in the Social Reconstruction Of Afghanistan in the Post 9/11 Era." *Central Asia Journal* 85, (Peshawar: Area study Centre, 2019): 81–82. <https://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/index.php/ca/article/view/12/9>

⁴ Ibid 3

various deals of over \$7 billion for the next 25 years. The sector includes oil, gas, and minerals exploration. In this regard, a substantial number of Chinese companies are working in various sectors and regions of Afghanistan

Russia:

Russia is also one of the real stakeholders in peace and development of Afghanistan due to a number of reasons such as drugs/narcotics, Central Asian security and investment in connectivity projects etc. For many years, Russia has been actively pursuing to expand its investments in Afghanistan for its socio-economic development and rebranding its image in the state.⁵ The connection between Russia's economic development initiatives and its soft power pursuits in the region is revealed most compellingly by its increased role in assisting Afghanistan's infrastructure development. The profitability of Russian investments for Afghanistan's socio-economic developments is certain. The Russian initiatives for reconstructing Afghanistan by facilitating new projects and reviving the previous ones have asserted its efficacy for socio-economic development as Russia has always shown interests to contribute to the transport, energy and electricity projects integrating Central and South Asia via Afghanistan.

In 2014, the government of Russia has enlisted 140 projects of Soviet-era that hoped to rehabilitate Afghanistan's future. Due to these and other such projects, the tide has slowly started to turn in socio-economic development of Afghanistan. Many Afghan government officials have accepted Russia's positive role in their country's rebuilding during the recent years.⁶ Presently, Russia is eager to keep Afghanistan stable in the aftermath of U.S withdrawal. In this regard, it can be anticipated that Russia will renew its investment and commitment to ensure sustainable economic development of Afghanistan to enable the country to eliminate dependence on drugs.⁷

⁵ Ramani, Samuel. "Russia's Soft Power Push in Afghanistan." *thediplomat.com*. The Diplomat, January 13, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/russias-soft-power-push-in-afghanistan/>

⁶ Sieff, Kevin. "Russia Hopes Infrastructure Projects Will Build Bridges in Afghanistan." *theguardian.com*. The Guardian, April 7, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/07/russia-afghanistan-investment-kabul-karzai>

⁷ Aliyev, Nurlan. "How Russia Views Afghanistan Today." *warontherocks.com*. War on the Rocks, October 19, 2020. <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/russias-contemporary-afghan-policy/>

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country and it has a virtue of having Islam's two holiest sites on its territory among many other religious honors. The prestigious influence combined with its wealth and resources proved instrumental in turning the tide of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The influence thus formed is still present in one form or another in Afghanistan. After the American invasion of Afghanistan, the country supported the American-backed Afghan government and provided economic assistance.⁸ It is expected that Saudi Arabia will play its role in the stabilization of the Afghanistan situation because of its regional and socio-economic responsibilities as a dominant religious and economic state in the region. Importantly it has the financial capacity to play an important role in socio-economic development of Afghanistan.

United Arab Emirates (UAE):

Government of the UAE has also played an intrinsic role in the civil construction and infrastructure development of Afghanistan during recent times. The assistance was done through the implementation of various projects, for example, the construction of the Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan housing project.⁹ As for the future of Afghanistan, UAE has pledged to keep its political and socio-economic assistance to the war-torn country in the decades to come with other regional stakeholders' help.¹⁰

Turkey:

Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for a long time. However, its presence in the military alliance has never been detrimental to the Afghan people or their interest. The country has provided ample socio-economic assistance to Afghanistan during the past two decades and has kept friendly relations with various Afghan factions. Consequently, the people of Afghanistan also consider Turkey as a true friend.

⁸ Sayed Salahuddin, "Afghans Welcome Saudi Assistance." arabnews.com. *Arab News*, (May 8, 2019). <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1494196/world>

⁹ *The UAE Aid to Afghanistan in (Construction and Civil Development) Sector*. mofaic.gov.ae. (UAE Embassy in Kabul, January 18, 2021). <https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/missions/kabul/media-hub/image-gallery/the-uae-aid-to-afghanistan-in-construction-and-civil-development-sector>

¹⁰ Guido Steinberg and Nils Woermer. "Exploring Iran & Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan: Stakeholders or Spoilers - A Zero Sum Game? Part 1: Saudi Arabia." *Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective*, (April 2013, 10) https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/175079/APRIL_2013_GUIDO%20STEINBERG&NILS_WOERMER.pdf

In 2018, seventy six Turkish companies were working in Afghanistan. Ninety percent (90%) of these companies played a significant role in the construction sector and completed more than 700 projects from 2003 to 2018.¹¹ In 2019, Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board signed a deal on cooperation and information sharing with Afghanistan's National Procurement Authority. This deal aims to enhance the trade volume of 150 million U.S dollars between both countries in the years to come.¹² Under these assertions, it is no surprise that the new US administration has recently shown its interest in asking Turkey to host a meeting of high-level between officials of Taliban and Afghans for finalizing the peace agreement between these parties. This initiative sheds ample light on the leverage and influence that Turkey can bring to the table by working with key power brokers both inside and outside the incumbent Afghan government.¹³ The Pakistan-Afghanistan-Turkey trilateral cooperation process has proved to be instrumental in this regard. This platform has been used for furthering the socio-economic interests of these three countries for a long time now. It has the potential to play its role in uplifting Afghanistan's society and economy in the aftermath of U.S withdrawal.

Iran:

Iran, like many other regional countries has its own significant political and converging socio-economic interests in Afghanistan. Until now, it has provided \$500 million to Kabul for its reconstruction. It is one of most significant trading and investment partners of Afghanistan. The experts believe that many economic projects have proved to be instrumental for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Even though Iranian policies regarding this region and especially Afghanistan have been at loggerheads with the American policies on most regional issues, Iran is expected to have a more proactive approach for socio-cultural and political reconstruction.¹⁴

Moreover, access to Iran's transportation infrastructure can also provide ample socio-economic dividends to land-locked Afghanistan. China's multi-

¹¹ *Turkey-Afghanistan Economic and Trade Relations.*” mfa.gov.tr. Republic of Turkey (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.) Accessed March 19, 2021. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-afghanistan.en.mfa

¹² Gokhan Ergocun. *Turkey, Afghanistan Sign Cooperation Agreement.* (aa.com.tr. Anadolu Ajansı, December 6, 2019). <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-afghanistan-sign-cooperation-agreement/1666012>

¹³ Menekse Tokyay’, “Turkey Likely to Host Afghan Peace Meeting.” arabnews.com. *Arabnews*, (March 8, 2021). <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1822046/middle-east>

¹⁴ Alireza Nader, Idrees Ahmad Rahmani, Robert Stewart, Ali G. Scotten and Leila Mahnad. “Conclusion and Implications for the United States.” Essay. In *Iran's Influence in Afghanistan; Implications for the U.S. Drawdown*, 46. (Washington DC, USA: RAND Corporation, 2014) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR616.html

billion-dollar investment initiatives can also play a decisive role in enhancing connectivity between Afghanistan and Iran. It can provide various employment and socio-economic initiatives for people of both countries.¹⁵

Uzbekistan:

Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has played a dynamic role in supporting the cause of Afghanistan's socio-economic reconstruction during recent years. Uzbekistan has accomplished Termiz-Mizar-e-Sharif Railway and also providing electricity to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan recently signed an agreement to extend this Termiz-Mizar-e-Sharif railway to Peshawar which will be instrumental in bringing socio-economic development to Afghanistan. It will also be a milestone in connecting Central Asia with Pakistan via Afghanistan. With the establishment of the bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and raising Afghan interests in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the prospects of cooperation are high between both the nations which also aim to enhance regional connectivity. In a recent speech at the SCO videoconference summit, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said:

“.....we are in favor of the soonest possible elaboration and adoption of a plan of practical actions to assist the social and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan within the framework of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. New prospects for all SCO countries are opening up through the initiatives of transport corridors that would help restore Afghanistan to its historic role as a bridge connecting the Central and South Asia.”¹⁶

Moreover, the share of Uzbekistan trade in Afghanistan's foreign trade has grown to 7.4% in recent years, while Afghanistan's share has gone up to 1.5%. According to the Uzbekistan's incumbent leadership, there is still a huge unused economic potential between both countries that will be explored in the near future. Furthermore, to fill the existing void, it has been targeted that the indicators of mutual trade between both countries should be increased up to two billion dollars by 2023. The adoption of such plans has already begun. The trading houses and free trade zones in Afghanistan are being constructed by the use of modern technologies.¹⁷

¹⁵ Inayat Ur Rehman Saqeb, “Iran's Balanced Role in Afghanistan.” *modern diplomacy.eu*. *Modern Diplomacy*, (September 12, 2020). <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/09/14/irans-balanced-role-in-afghanistan/>

¹⁶ *President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's Speech at the SCO Videoconference Summit.* *president.uz*. Ўзбекистон Республикаси Президенти, (November 10, 2020). <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/3936>

¹⁷ “Why Is It Important to Involve Afghanistan in the Central Asian Economy?” *uzbekembassy.com.my*. Why is it important to involve Afghanistan in the Central Asian economy? (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, February 19, 2021).

Kazakhstan:

Kazakhstan has been providing long-term support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan for a long time now. The mutual trade between both countries has increased exponentially during the last few years. Moreover, it has also fulfilled its international pledge of economic assistance to Afghanistan in the meantime.¹⁸ The prestigious Bolashak education program has trained more than 1,000 Afghan students in Kazakh Universities. Among other such initiatives, it has been noticed that the country has provided more than \$80 million of financial assistance to Afghanistan through its foreign aid agency KazAID. The majority of the foreign aid budget of Kazakhstan has gone to Afghanistan, focusing on multiple fields. For example, infrastructure development, humanitarian aid, and facilitate gender equality initiatives.¹⁹ Other Central Asia Republics (CARs) will also have their sizeable part in Afghanistan's socio-economic rehabilitation in the decades to come.

Role of Regional Organizations for Socio-Economic Growth in Afghanistan: An Overview

The abovementioned prominent regional countries have played a great role in ensuring sustainable socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. However, the role of regional organizations in ensuring socio-economic development has great significance and cannot be overlooked. Over the past decades, many regional organizations have been established to improve the socio-economic situation in Asia. With enhanced cooperation and better-planned initiatives by organizations, many milestones have been achieved. These platforms have allowed all giant and small Asian countries to contribute to this region's development cohesively.

The *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)* plays a crucial role in providing a realistic approach and execution to achieve smooth socio-economic growth in Afghanistan. The SCO member countries always had a unanimous belief that peace cannot be achieved in Afghanistan through military action, and negotiations are the only solution for the cessation of hostilities. After supporting and welcoming the peace negotiations and

https://uzbekembassy.com.my/eng/news_press/economy/why_is_it_important_to_invol_ve_afghanistan_in_the_central_asian_economy.html

¹⁸ Zhanna Akhmetova, "Kazakhstan's Assistance to Afghanistan Helps Strengthen Regional and Global Security, Diplomat Says." *The Astana Times*, (September 25, 2018.) <https://astanatimes.com/2018/09/kazakhstans-assistance-to-afghanistan-helps-strengthen-regional-and-global-security-diplomat-says/>

¹⁹ Adam Gallagher, "Afghanistan: Can Central Asia Help Spur Peace with the Taliban?" usip.org. (United States Institute of Peace, July 28, 2020). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/afghanistan-can-central-asia-help-spur-peace-taliban>

agreement between the USA and the Taliban,²⁰ SCO is now ready to provide much-needed financial help to the Afghan people.²¹

During recent years, the SCO-affiliated countries have coordinated in strategizing development for the BRI initiative's joint building. It targets to construct pervasive connectivity networks of trade and infrastructure development from Asia to Europe-Africa and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes passing through Afghanistan. Moreover, these member countries have also signed the accord on facilitation of International Road Transport. The transportation line of 9,300 kilometers has a great potential to connect Afghanistan with other countries of the region.²²

The World Bank has also played an instrumental role in Afghanistan's socio-economic development so far and has committed itself to more than 4.7 billion U.S dollars for development projects in the war-ravaged country. The World Bank has contributed to energy and infrastructure projects in Afghanistan in a big way. Moreover, it has also administered and kept a check on Afghanistan's reconstruction trust fund that has amassed more than 12.27 billion U.S dollars as of 1st October 2020. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, World Bank has pledged to support Afghanistan's economic stability with other development partners involved in reconstruction in the country. The decline in these grants can threaten the already fragile socio-economic structure and prospects for future development. And can prove to be detrimental to the region as well.²³

Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is run with the combined efforts and monetary assistance of Asian countries, has also prioritized analyzing and support Afghanistan's growth. As a country affected by conflict, Afghanistan has been classified as a Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations (FCAS) country by ADB.²⁴ There are many challenges that can change the geo-economic and geopolitical scenarios and therefore an integrated policy framework is pertinent to be established in this regard. India has done much to defunct and sabotages **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**. However, other partner states in the association can

²⁰ 上海合作组织 Шанхайская Организация Сотрудничества *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*. SCO, (September 16, 2020).

<http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20200916/677178.html>

²¹ Warikoo, K., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan / SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, (InfoSCO, April 26, 2019). <http://infoshos.ru/en/?idn=21303>

²² "How Does SCO Bring Afghanistan 'Closer to Peace'?" *CGTN* (June 11, 2019). <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d3255544d35457a6333566d54/index.html>

²³ *The World Bank in Afghanistan*, World Bank, (October 1, 2020). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview>

²⁴ Elmer. *Afghanistan and ADB*. (Asian Development Bank, March 5, 2021). <https://www.adb.org/countries/afghanistan/main>

join hands to incorporate Afghanistan into their ambit to provide wide-ranging economic benefits and incentives in the fields of trade and commerce.

Conclusion:

For more than forty years, the Afghan people have endured dreadful wars, deaths and destruction. With the end of these calamities nearing, every regional state must play its role in Afghanistan's socio-economic reconstruction while ensuring that the regional spoilers working to sabotage these optimistic initiatives are under control. The USA is eager to withdraw its military forces from this region in the coming months. In this regard, it will require support from regional countries to keep Afghanistan's long-term stability intact. Under such circumstances, all the leading regional players must form a prudent and systematic policy structure for Afghanistan's reconstruction. The regional cooperation, peace, harmony and stability in the state will have ripple effects. The best strategy is to develop hard infrastructure through Afghanistan as there are already plans under Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) for roads and highways. Likewise software i.e. harmonization and coordination of policies for smooth regional trade via Afghanistan is also imperative. It will pave the way for the immense socio-economic development to witness the rise of a new dawn of prosperity in the decades to come. For achieving these goals, all regional countries must strive hard to provide monetary and technical assistance and make sure that the Afghan diaspora is allowed to come back in a dignified and peaceful manner in order to play role in re-building their country and making post-US Afghanistan more prosperous.

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