
Legal and Strategic Cooperation between China and Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities through the Wakhan Corridor

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Asian economic potential draws world attention. Recently, China challenges the US's economic and political dominance which prompted the US-China trade war. Afghanistan and other Arab nations struggled for decades amid an informal US colony after Saddam Hossain's fall. After the US troops left Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban took over it. Afghanistan's trade and military advantage make it vital as middle east geopolitics alter. This has been noticed by China. China-Afghanistan military cooperation improves trade. All in Eurasia is seeing China penetrate global value networks and the Belt and Road supply chains. The 21st century's Silk Road connects Eastern Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. China-Afghanistan cooperation along the Wakhan Corridor is the key to the success of the Silk Road initiative. China-Afghanistan wants to use the corridor more, which has been a commerce and military battleground. The essay discusses China-Afghanistan strategic relations along the Wakhan Corridor from a legal and strategic perspective.

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I. Introduction

The Asian region is considered to have a promising future and special attraction point in the global economic environment.¹ Largely, the rise of Asia is attributed to the success of emerging economies such as China and India.² China is one of the most vibrant and promising economies in this region, being the only country challenging the economic and political hegemony of the US.³ The trade war between the US and China has been the outcome of the same tussle and economic friction.⁴ Meanwhile, Arab countries have demonstrated instability and western interventions in one or the other form of conflicts for decades. One of such countries is Afghanistan. After the collapse of Saddam Hossain's dictatorship, Afghanistan became an informal colony of the US. After the withdrawal of US troops in 2021, however, Afghanistan became an empty ground fully controlled by the Taliban regime.⁵ The dynamic and strategic changes happening in the Middle East geo-politics has increased the relevance of Afghanistan, as it has a strategic geo-political advantage for trade as well as military cooperation.

China as a geopolitical hegemony in the world politics and economy has a say more in the global affairs. The cooperation between China and Afghanistan not only opens avenues for military cooperation, but also underlies trade relation. China is fast integrating the Global Value Chains as well as expanding its own supply chains across Asian and Eurasian region mainly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Among

1 Luis Simón, *Europe, the Rise of Asia and the Future of the Transatlantic Relationship*, 91:5 INT'L AFF. 969-89 (2015); TERUTOMO OZAWA, THE RISE OF ASIA: THE 'FLYING-GEESSE' THEORY OF TANDEM GROWTH AND REGIONAL AGGLOMERATION 3 (2009); FRANK TIPTON, THE RISE OF ASIA: ECONOMICS, SOCIETY, AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA 171 (1998).

2 PENG ER LAM, THE RISE OF CHINA AND INDIA: A NEW ASIAN DRAMA 1 (2009); Harsh Pant, *India in the Asia-Pacific: Rising Ambitions with an Eye on China*, 14:1 ASIA-PAC. REV. 54-71 (2007).

3 Byung-Joon Ahn, *The Rise of China and the Future of East Asian Integration*, 11:2 ASIA-PAC. REV. 18-35 (2004).

4 Mohd Rahman et al., *Impact of US-China Trade War on Asian Economies: Neural Network Multilayer Perceptron Approach*, 16:2 J. CHINESE ECON. & FOREIGN TRADE STUD. 172-89 (2023).

5 Saira Akram & Muqarrab Akbar, *US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Emerging Challenges and Future Prospects*, 6:1 GLOB. FOREIGN POL'Y REV. 97-111 (2023).

this grand strategic initiative, the Wakhan Corridor is a point of contention because the success of the 21st century's Silk Road will substantially depend on how China and Afghanistan administer and cooperate in this region. Trade units and military presence in the corridor has remained an issue of tussle, yet China-Afghanistan cooperation is looking forward to exploiting the corridor to the fuller extent possible.

The primary purpose of this essay is to investigate the China-Afghanistan strategic relations in the light of Wakhan Corridor from the eyes of international law and strategy. This essay is composed of six Parts including Introduction and Conclusion. Part two will overview geographical background of the Wakhan Corridor. Part three will discuss China-Afghanistan relations. Part four will analyze the challenges of the Wakhan Corridor. Part five will elucidate the opportunities open for China and Afghanistan.

2. The Wakhan Corridor: A Geopolitical Background

The Wakhan Corridor is one of the most strategic locations for Afghanistan which is surrounded by China, India, Tajikistan and Pakistan.⁶ All the four countries sharing borders can be linked via land route though the Wakhan Corridor and benefit with each other. The Wakhan Corridor in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan is admired by its strategic location as a connecting point of the Eurasian continent. Historically, the corridor was part of the 21st century's Silk Road of China facilitating trade and communication with the neighbouring countries including Afghanistan. The Wakhan Corridor is also strategic point for China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Figure 1: The region around the Wakhan Corridor



6 William Rowe, *The Wakhan Corridor: endgame of the Great Game*, in *BORDERLINES AND BORDERLANDS: POLITICAL ODDITIES AT THE EDGE OF THE NATION-STATE* 54 (Alexander Diener & Joshua Hagen eds., 2010).

Due to its presence near Greater Kashmir India, this corridor closely monitors the alliance along the corridor. To the edge of Afghanistan, the corridor stands as a chance to revive its cooperation with neighbouring countries and to enhance trade participation for the country, much needed after the US exit from its soil.

However, the three tridents of conflict, that is, China, Pakistan and India, remains a boiling point now and then. While India-Pakistan's conflict is ongoing with respect to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), the strategic interests of both countries lies along the corridor. India has often reiterated the consequences of Pakistani movement along the corridor and its implications on POK. On the other hand, China also has some border disputes with India in the Arunachal region and Ladakh region, seen by India as an emerging threat to its sovereignty. The Wakhan Corridor itself is point at issue; India wants to negotiate with Afghanistan. This is the reason why India has had several negotiations with the Taliban regime who has generally extended its support to India about the Wakhan Corridor, while cooperating with China for the infrastructure development of the corridor.⁷

Giving a glance to Figure 1 highlights several key strategic issues. First is the locational advantage of the corridor as it is touching Tajikistan, Pakistan, China and below the Little Pamir with Greater Kashmir (India). It is a great entry point for China in terms of supply chains. The manufacturing hubs under the BRI can be established near the China-Afghanistan Border, from which the goods can be supplied to Afghanistan via road and then further to the neighbouring countries along the Wakhan Corridor. It works as a link to Central Asia and Europe, while bringing the total transportation cost to a lower range. This competitive pricing will be an edge for China to enter and capture markets in Central Asia and Europe, furthering the cause of the BRI Project.⁸

However, the industrial expansion is just a tip of iceberg. Military cooperation can be furthered exploiting the Wakhan Corridor. As has been pointed out by India and other countries,⁹ for example, CPEC could not be just an economic arrangement but one extending to military cooperation, threatening neighbouring countries. In the long run, this can also be true for the Wakhan Corridor. As shown at Figure 1, the Wakhan Corridor is surrounded by Tajikistan and Pakistan, further bolstering its geopolitical significance. Both Tajikistan and Pakistan are interested in the

7 Hasan Malik, *Geo-political Significance of the Wakhan Corridor for China*, 7:2 FUDAN J. HUMAN. & SOC. SCI. 307-23 (2014).

8 Shahana Naseer, *Why Wakhan Corridor is Significant for China?*, MATRIX MAG. (Jan. 17, 2025), <https://matrixmag.com/why-wakhan-corridor-is-significant-for-china>.

9 Yalana Payeng, *India Against CPEC: A Critical Analysis*, DEF. RES. & STUD. (Sept. 19, 2024), <https://dras.in/india-against-cpec-a-critical-analysis>.

infrastructure development of the corridor and to reap benefits of bilateral and multilateral trade between the countries bordering the corridor.

Nonetheless, there is not a comprehensive initiative on the part of Afghanistan for such cooperation yet. Afghanistan is currently focusing on China's involvement in the Wakhan Corridor as it is the only country which can massively invest in the corridor. The roads in the Wakhan Corridor have been improved and extended for the ease of trade between China and Afghanistan. It will not be surprising for China and Afghanistan to sign a formal agreement for economic and military cooperation. The increasing dominance of China and its investment in large scale infrastructure in the value chains highlights the interests in Wakhan Corridor. From the perspective of Afghanistan, the corridor is an avenue to increase trade and investment from China, one of the most vibrant economies of the world. After the exit of the US troops, Afghanistan's Taliban regime is continuously looking for new partners to bolster its military power. For them, China will be the best. The road connectivity of Afghanistan gives it an edge in Central Asia. Since the Ukraine-Russia conflict, China and Russia have been strengthening military partnership. Joining this Russo-China alliance may be a good option for Taliban as it cannot go for alliances with western nations owing to its historical past with the US. Moreover, stability in Afghanistan can be formed by new alliances; the Taliban regime is shifting its focus from conflict to cooperation. Taliban undeniably is looking at the Wakhan Corridor as a ray of hope for Afghanistan's future.

3. China-Afghanistan Relations: Past, Present and Future

China-Afghanistan diplomatic relations begin in January 1950, when the Afghan government recognised China, and the diplomatic relations started in the year 1955. Until 1960, China and Afghanistan only had the diplomatic talks. Starting from 1960s, however, their relations started to improve further by cooperating in trade and investment. After insurgency started in Afghanistan in 1970s, China was suspected to be the country to provide with military aid to Afghanistan to fight against the US, Pakistan and Russia. These demographic factors of Afghanistan never allowed a full-fledged open cooperation between the two countries though China was sharing borders with Afghanistan. This was mainly due to the presence of other countries

in Afghanistan. As Afghanistan is free from outside forces, however, a possibility of open cooperation between China and Afghanistan is not far away.¹⁰

The strategic interests of China to cooperate with Afghanistan stems from two objectives, that is, national security and economic expansion. In both cases, China and Afghanistan may be at an advantage and beneficial with each other.¹¹ An enquiry into the growing relations between China and Afghanistan highlights the intentions of China. Afghanistan is rich in natural resources such as Aynak copper and oil reserves. In such a scenario, China's interest in cooperating and assisting with Afghanistan is a national policy. Trade dominance of China in the region is not possible without cooperation with Afghanistan. This is the reason, at the level of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), why China supported the sovereignty and security concerns of Afghanistan.¹²

In a report published by CSIS on China-Afghanistan relations,¹³ the key issues identified between the countries are Security, Post War Rebuilding and SCO activities. All the three concerns align with the Chinese perception of security in Central Asia. A peaceful Central Asia is indispensable for the economic expansion of China. The report highlights that China remains low in terms of active participation in the security affairs of Afghanistan but still have a stake and attempt to influence through other multilateral organisations such as SCO.¹⁴ Since the launch of the BRI, China's interests in Afghanistan have been going up, particularly for the development of transport corridor. Also, after the withdrawal of the US troops, China is trying to bring stability in the region as has been very clear with the frequent visits of Chinese army officials to Afghanistan.¹⁵ Probably, the cooperation between the two countries may continue considering the joint stakes as the "new neighbourhood diplomacy."¹⁶

Another study has attempted to investigate the trident relations between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the light of emerging China-Pakistan joint collaborations in security and trade. China's clear interests are security, energy, connectivity and geopolitics, while Pakistan recognizes the Durand Line as an official border with

10 Mohammad Ehsan, *Afghanistan-China Relations, 1955-2012*, 17:3 HIMALAYAN & CENT. ASIAN STUD. 230 (2013).

11 Raja Khan, *China's Economic and Strategic Interests in Afghanistan*, 1:1 FWU J. SOC. SCI. 1-11 (2015).

12 Noor Tahiri, *Afghanistan and China Trade Relationship* 9 (MPRA Working Paper No. 82098, 2017), https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/82098/1/MPRA_paper_82098.pdf.

13 Zhao Huasheng & Andrew Kuchins, *China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives* 4 (CSIS, 2012), https://ciss.tsinghua.edu.cn/upload_files/atta/1626330667392_F9.pdf.

14 *Id.* at 9-10.

15 Feng Zhang, *China's New Engagement with Afghanistan after the Withdrawal*, 2:3 LSE PUB. POL'Y REV. 1-13 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.52>.

16 Zhao Huasheng, *Afghanistan and China's New Neighbourhood Diplomacy*, 92:4 INT'L AFF. 891-908 (2016).

Afghanistan and prevents “hostile elements” from using the Afghan territory.¹⁷ Pakistan initially helped to build Taliban-China contacts and then have extended its cooperation with China through CPEC and BRI to Afghanistan.¹⁸ Rasooli et al. have referred to China’s policy shift towards Afghanistan from indifference to a strategic stance after the exit of the US.¹⁹ They say a vacuum created in Afghanistan after the exit of the US troops and complete takeover by the Taliban has pushed China to get involved with Afghanistan strategically.²⁰ China’s primary interest is to build strategic partnership with Afghanistan and further capture the markets of Central Asia.²¹ The China- Afghanistan relations are implemented through SCO, AIIB and BRI more concretely. In these three platforms, Afghanistan has welcomed the China’s role in pushing forward its security concerns. On a geopolitics context, this study has compared China-Afghanistan relations to Afghanistan-US relations.²²

Afghanistan’s cooperation with China can benefit it largely due to China’s transcontinental connectivity ventures. For a long time, Afghanistan has remained isolated in terms of trade and logistics connectivity which is an important indicator for development. The strategic partnership with China is thus a hope for Afghanistan to reap the developmental benefits in the region.²³ In this regard, Tahir and Hussain have also stated that cooperation between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan can have spillover effects on the peace in the region because Afghanistan being relatively an instable country in Central Asia can emerge out from isolation and have better representation in the global affairs.²⁴

After its troops withdrew from Afghanistan, meanwhile, the US has still interest in stabilising the Afghan regimes for security concerns. Now China can act as a balancing force and the US is ready to cooperate on this ground with China.²⁵ Jabarkhil examines Afghanistan’s relationship with China, analyzing their historical connections and

17 Ghulam Ali, *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies*, 35:3 PAC. REV. 506-28 (2022).

18 *Id.*

19 Muaiyid Rasooli et al., *China-Afghanistan Relations: Change to the Path of Strategic Partnership*, 10:6 ACAD. J. HIST. & IDEA [Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi] 2603-27 (2024).

20 *Id.*

21 *Id.*

22 Zabehullah Bashardost, *A Comparative Study on the Afghan-China Relation Based on Afghan-US Relation*, 2:2 J. SOC. SCI. & POL. SCI. 285-304 (2019).

23 Shubhangi Pandey, *Understanding China’s Afghanistan Policy: From Calculated Indifference to Strategic Engagement* 2, ORF Issue Brief No. 305 (Aug. 2019), <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230915110024.pdf>.

24 Mariam Tahir & Nazir Hussain, *China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan: Partnership for Regional Peace*, 36:1 S. ASIAN STUD. 165-78 (2021).

25 Zhao Minghao, *Afghanistan and China-US Relations*, in *EXPLORING THE FRONTIERS OF U.S.-CHINA STRATEGIC COOPERATION: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES BEYOND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION* (Melanie Hart ed., 2014).

Chinese influence on Afghanistan's economic development.²⁶ He underscores China's investments in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and long-term initiatives, which facilitate job creation, income enhancement, and comprehensive development.²⁷ The increasing trade volume between Afghanistan and China highlights their robust bilateral relations. Moreover, China supports Afghanistan in other social infrastructure including education and telecommunications. The two nations coordinate on security initiatives to address shared dangers.²⁸

4. Challenges of the Wakhan Corridor

A. Challenges for Afghanistan

The Wakhan Corridor is located in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan which is largely dominated by Wakhi tribe. The first and foremost challenge of the Afghan government is to bring stability in the region by curtailing or managing the resistance movements by the different tribes. Largely being a tribal region, bringing reforms is not an easy task as it is always seen as a kind of infiltration. Maintaining peace among the resurgent groups is an uphill task for the Afghan government. The area is largely underdeveloped without infrastructure. Considering the internal conflicts and instability, it is hardly possible that all investments are coming from the outside world, let alone the domestic investment. Nothing is clear enough to forecast in this region.²⁹

The second issue is the military presence in the Badakhshan province. As the Wakhan district has less density, to manage such a huge area requires additional military presence. Currently, the Afghan military focuses on border and internal security of important provinces such as Kabul. Administering the Badakhshan province may become much more difficult once the development tasks are initiated.

The third issue pertains to neighbouring Pakistan. The development of Wakhan Corridor may pose a sovereign threat to Pakistan as it may lead to frequent cross

26 Gulbadin & Samim Jabarkhil, *Effect of Afghanistan-China Relationship on Economic Growth: A Comprehensive Analysis*, 2:1 INT'L J. SOC. SCI. BULL. 24-36 (2024).

27 *Id.*

28 *Id.*

29 Aarish Khan, *The Reality of Afghanistan's Land Link with China*, DIPLOMAT (Oct. 9, 2024), <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/the-reality-of-afghanistans-land-link-with-china>.

border movements of people from both the sides. Afghan and Pakistani populations share same religion, which may make it easy for illegal migration and even infiltration with resurgent groups from both sides.³⁰

B. Challenges to China

China's primary concern for the Wakhan Corridor is strategic partnership. But the partnership comes with lots of challenges, such as Taliban's internal conflict, resurgent groups near Chinese border, and cultural and religious affinity between Taliban and Uyghurs. Afghanistan has been marred by internal conflicts since the late 1970s when the former USSR invaded it. In spite of several wars, however, Afghanistan has not been fully buried or colonized yet. It will thus remain a challenge for the Chinese to deal with the Afghan regime considering the prevailing internal conflicts.

The cultural and religious affinity between Taliban and Uyghurs has been closely monitored by China. As both shares the border area, the long-term implication of cooperation needs to be assessed by China. Although there has been no problem but the Taliban's approach of universal brotherhood would create unrest, if not political, at least a social one.³¹

Yet another issue is the future intervention of the US in the region. The US troops left the region when it was devastated, but the US does not deny the interest for the future.³² Once the Wakhan Corridor becomes sound and developed, the US interest will increase and try to intervene in the region. Arguably, Pakistan which has a historical tilt towards the US may invoke this cause further. In this regard, China needs to be cautious if such a scenario emerges. China has invested huge amounts of money in South Asian countries, an example being Sri Lanka. But China has been alleged of debt trap policies. This image of China, if accepted by the Afghanis, may create tensions and a tough time for Chinese investments in the Wakhan region. Even if initial investments are not opposed, the return emerging out of the investments may not be fully repatriated to China. It may lead to further conflicts between Afghanistan and China.³³

30 Abdul Safi, *Impact of Pakistan's Decision to Deport Illegal Afghan Immigrants on Regional Stability-OpEd*, EURASIA REV. (Nov. 9, 2023), <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09112023-impact-of-pakistans-decision-to-deport-illegal-afghan-immigrants-on-regional-stability-oped>.

31 Ayjaz Wani, *China's dichotomous ties with the Taliban and Uyghurs*, ORF (Sept. 26, 2023), <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-s-dichotomous-ties-with-the-taliban-and-uyghurs>.

32 Zabih Shahnan & Ejaz Hussain, *US-Afghanistan Relations Post-withdrawal: Is There a Future?*, 11:3 J. ASIAN SEC. & INT'L AFF. 301-19 (2024).

33 Jajati Pattnaik & Chandan Panda, *Dragon in Elephant's backyard: The Chinese South Asian debt trap*, FIRSTPOST (June 1, 2024), <https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/dragon-in-elephants-backyard-the-chinese-south-asian-debt-trap-13777512.html>.

As an indispensable part of the ancient Silk Road, the Wakhan Corridor is a key passage for China to access Central and South Asia. China has always attached great importance to the development of the Wakhan Corridor. 60 years ago, China built the Karakoram Highway from Kash in Xinjiang to Takot in Pakistan.³⁴ This road, crossing the Pamir Plateau and the Hindu Kush Mountains, is an important external communication channel in western China, which plays an important role in establishing CPEC. In January 2025, however, China suddenly interrupted its cooperation with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the Wakhan Corridor, so that the previously planned new China Afghanistan railway was also suspended. This is mainly based on the following considerations.

Firstly, disputes over historic title and rights to the Wakhan Corridor still exist. At the end of the 19th century, the Wakhan Corridor, which originally belonged to the Qing Dynasty, China was assigned to Afghanistan by Britain and Russia. Based on the peaceful resolution of international disputes and the promotion of regional development cooperation, neighbouring countries are still able to negotiate for the development of the Wakhan Corridor. Secondly, the necessity of preventing and controlling terrorism is considered by the Chinese government. Due to the complex ethnic situation in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, China has re-examined the construction of Highway and other cooperation in the region.³⁵ Thirdly, the Wakhan Corridor is a drug smuggling channel flowing from Afghanistan and even Central Asia to China. China has always advocated for win-win cooperation in diplomacy but the bottom line and principles of diplomacy are still the interests of state.³⁶

C. Challenges to Other Neighbouring Countries

Pakistan, Tajikistan and India are affected by Wakhan Corridor. For Pakistan, the Afghanistan-India partnership is a big challenge. India has made a substantial investment in Afghanistan's reconstruction; both share good relations. A good number Afghans visit to India for the purposes of healthcare, tourism, trade, etc.³⁷

34 Samantha Shea, *The road that's the 'Eighth World Wonder'*, BBC News (Sept. 4, 2023), <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20230903-the-karakoram-highway-the-road-thats-the-eighth-world-wonder>.

35 Wei Li, *Research on National Relationship in Xinjiang under the Leapfrog Development Horizon* [跨越式发展视域下的新疆民族关系问题研究], 35:5 GUIZHOU ETHNIC STUD. [贵州民族研究] 13-4 (2014), <https://chn.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=GZNY201405005&dbcode=CJFQ&dbname=CJFD2014&uniplatform=NZKPT>.

36 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Confident and independent, open and inclusive, fair and just, cooperative and win-win - Speech at the 2023 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Symposium, Speech by Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of PRC [自信自立, 开放包容, 公道正义, 合作共赢 - 在2023年国际形势与中国外交研讨会上的演讲] (Jan. 9, 2024), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjb_673085/zjjg_673183/xws_674681/xgxw_674683/202401/t20240109_11220573.shtml.

37 How many do Afghans visit India? For example, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India for medical purposes from Afghanistan stands at 46,811 (2018), 33,004 (2019), 16,185 (2020) & 19,556 (2021). See Hey Docta, Comprehensive

Considering India's growing economic prowess, India's investment in the corridor is expected to be expanded in the future. In such a scenario, Pakistan will always be sceptical how the corridor will be used in case a conflict between India and Pakistan. Pakistan's limitation lies in its inability to invest in the corridor as it is itself struggling with the IMF debt. For India, the challenge lies with the control of the corridor largely by China.³⁸

The Gilgit-Baltistan region, which is the border with Wakhan Corridor, is at stake for the conflict between Pakistan-India-China, while the China-Pakistan are coming together under CPEC. India has raised the issue of threat to its sovereignty due to the development in the Gilgit-Baltistan region alleging the expansionary role of China. For India, responding to the developments in the Wakhan Corridor will remain a critical point at issue as part of its foreign policy measures. Though, currently there is negligible military presence of China in the Wakhan region, movement along the border has increased over the years. India is cautious about future as the trend may lead to presence of Chinese troops in the Wakhan Corridor, in the name of industrialization.³⁹

5. Opportunities Emerging out of the Wakhan Corridor

A. Opportunities for Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been struggling to reconstruct its economy and political system since the exit of the US troops. The vacuum created by the US should be filled with better infrastructure, development,⁴⁰ employment, education, healthcare, etc. Most of the economic and social indicators of Afghanistan are below the Asian averages, let alone the global standard. Specifically, in the Badakhshan province, the conditions are much worse. As per UNICEF report of 2022, 8 out of every 10 Afghan people drink

Analysis of Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India for Medical Purposes: 2018-2021 Trends and Insights, <https://heydocta.com/tourist-arrivals-in-india-for-medical-purposes>.

38 Gazi Shahid, Pakistan, *China's COWARDLY plot to corner India uncovered! Plan to capture strategic corridor in..., its significant because...*, INDIA.COM (Jan. 11, 2025), <https://www.india.com/news/world/pakistan-china-cowardly-plot-to-corner-india-uncovered-plan-to-capture-strategic-wakhan-corridor-in-afghanistan-its-significant-because-xinjiang-tajikistan-afghan-taliban-pakistan-taliban-war-7531317>.

39 *Id.*

40 A. Siddiqui & S. Naureen, *China-Afghanistan Relations: Implications for China in the Post-US Military Exit from Afghanistan*, 2:2 UCP J. Hum. & Soc. Sci. 55-71 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jhss.02.02.181>.

unsafe water with only 37% literacy rate as per World Bank data.⁴¹

The Wakhan Corridor is an opportunity for the region to improve its economic and social indicators. First, the corridor will pave way for investments in the infrastructure facilities, particularly the road connectivity to other regions and neighbouring countries. This will enhance trade and investment avenues for Afghanistan in general and the Badakhshan province in particular.⁴² Second, Afghanistan can prompt military cooperation with neighbouring countries. The Afghan military is outdated and lacks modernization. To be an active player in Central Asian region and considering the ongoing Middle East conflicts, Afghanistan needs to upgrade its military equipment and facilities. The Wakhan Corridor will bring such countries as China, Pakistan and India to collaborate with Afghanistan in terms of strategic and military partnership. A military cooperation for Afghanistan will also help to bring peace and order in the country, which is a ground for economic growth and social development including value and supply chains. This in turn will generate employment and trained workforce requirement, opening a new chapter in the training and education sector.⁴³

B. Opportunities for China

China is looking at the Wakhan Corridor as a transport passage for entry into Central Asia and Eurasia as well as a security-strategic geographical location.⁴⁴ Imagine a scenario of China-India War or India-Pakistan War. The Wakhan Corridor will act as a critical networking point for military transfer and strategic positioning of the armies. The geographical control or at least influence of the Wakhan Corridor will be an advantage in the control of trade routes in Central Asia. Therefore, for China to expand its diplomatic and military influence, the corridor's success is imperative.⁴⁵

To succeed in the BRI, China needs huge amount of infrastructure and investment platforms. Most of the countries along the route are interested in investing in the BRI through railway lines, roads, economic zones, etc. As the BRI is a massive infrastructure project, China's investment into the Wakhan Corridor will bear fruits in the future by improving the connectivity through Afghanistan. Although this may not be a smooth transition due to internal affairs of Afghanistan, the determining

41 UNICEF, Afghanistan: WASH on the Brink, at 2, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/afghanistan-wash-brink>.

42 Irfan Amir, *Geostrategic Importance of the Wakhan Corridor: Gateway to Regional Connectivity*, 76:4 PAK. HORIZON 85-101 (2023).

43 Muhammad Munir & Muhammad Shafiq, *Geostrategic Significance of Wakhan Corridor for Afghanistan, China and Pakistan*, 22:1 MORGALLA PAPERS 203-15 (2018).

44 Malik, *supra* note 7.

45 *Id.*

factor will be how it manages the current risk.⁴⁶

Moreover, China may fill the vacuum that has been created by the exit of the US. China should make use of this opportunity to improve its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and to bring stability and peace in this region. As Afghanistan is passing through a reconstruction phase, China's support will be a welcome by the Afghan government.⁴⁷

Although China is cautious about the development of the Wakhan Corridor region, in the long run, China will definitely engage in further consultations and cooperation with neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan in order to establish a regional cooperation mechanism for the following reasons. First, China has the driving force to participate in the cooperative development of the Wakhan Corridor. China has a long history of negotiations with neighbouring countries in the region. If the BRI is deepening from the economic to the cultural and political fields, the ties between neighbouring countries can be strengthening. The Wakhan Corridor is located over 100 kilometres in China and is crucial for China's access to southern Pakistan. China can not only extend CPEC through the road between China and Afghanistan, but also use this channel to directly open the door to Central Asia and further exert the influence of the BRI in the world.⁴⁸

Second, China may increase security investment in the Wakhan Corridor; engage in military cooperation with neighbouring countries; and establish new security building to combat terrorism and drug trafficking.⁴⁹ In fact, China and Tajikistan already conducted open bilateral joint security exercises before 2014, which became more active after 2014.⁵⁰ If regular joint patrols can be established with Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the Wakhan Corridor, terrorism and drug trafficking will no longer be thorny issues hindering the development of the Wakhan Corridor. In this regard, China adopted National Security Law⁵¹ and Counterterrorism Law in 2015 (amended

46 Dharmendra Shahi, *Geopolitical and Geostrategic Significance of Wakhan Corridor*, 12:7 INT'L J. RES. SOC. SCI. 115-23 (2022).

47 Anisha Maulida, *The Impact of the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Pakistan and China*, in ANALYSING THE CURRENT AFGHAN CONTEXT 12-24 (Neeraj Manhas ed., 2022).

48 Zhu Yongbiao & Hu Ning, *One Corridor Connecting Four Countries: Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor Welcomes a New Era?* [一廊连四国: 阿富汗瓦罕走廊迎来新生?], 12:12 WORLD KNOWLEDGE [世界知识] 66-7 (2024).

49 He Jie, *Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Afghanistan* [“一带一路”倡议下中国与阿富汗经贸合作的现状、挑战与对策], 50:6 J. XINJIANG U. PHIL. & SOC. SCI. [新疆大学学报(哲学社会科学版)] 45-6 (2022), <https://chn.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=XJDB202206005&dbcode=CJFQ&dbname=CJFDLAST2023&uniplatform=NZKPT>.

50 Dirk van der Kley, *China's Security Activities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor* 72 (Essay from NBR Special Report No. 80, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2019), https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr80_securing_the_belt_and_road_sep2019.pdf.

51 National Security Law of the People's Republic of China, adopted at the 15th session of the Standing Committee of the

in 2018).⁵²

Third, China's cooperation with Afghanistan can control India's expansion in the region. At present, India and Afghanistan have reached an agreement on import and export cooperation in the Chabahar Port. In order to avoid further expansion of India's influence in the region, China should adjust its strategic stance and enhance its cooperation with Afghanistan. Cooperation in the Wakhan Corridor can serve as an opportunity.⁵³

C. Opportunities for Other Neighbouring Countries

Pakistan, Tajikistan and India can also benefit from the Wakhan Corridor in different manners. Pakistan uses this chance to build better ties with Afghanistan to mark its presence. China and Pakistan already share CPEC, which is near the Wakhan Corridor. Merging of CPEC and Wakhan (with a common administration policy) will further strengthen Pakistan-China corridor for the benefit of Pakistan. As Pakistan is struggling with its economic challenges, it is looking for better trade networks in the region. Considering that the Indian market is not opened for Pakistan, trading through the Wakhan Corridor can be economic saviour for Pakistan. This may also lead to the justification of the presence of Pakistan's military in the trade routes.⁵⁴

For Tajikistan, which is an isolated Central Asian country having good trade ties with China, the Wakhan Corridor is a transnational trade and investment way. Tajikistan has not yet participated in any of the transnational project except the BRI. Even Tajikistan has meagre share

Meanwhile, India's conflict with Pakistan is never ending and there seems no remote possibility of cooperation. Pakistan's role in Greater Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan region is not welcomed by India and its participation in the Wakhan Corridor project can be a challenge to India's strategic interest in the region. Therefore, India should directly approach to Afghanistan for investment in the Wakhan Corridor bypassing China and Pakistan. This will ensure that Afghanistan's corridor is only

Twelfth National People's Congress on July 1, 2015 [CLI Code] CLI.1.250527(EN), http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/lftz/rlys/2014-08/31/content_1876769.htm accessed on May 12.

52 Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China (2018 Amendment), promulgated by Order No. 36 of the President of the People's Republic of China on December 27, 2015, and amended according to the Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to Amend Six Laws Including the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law of the People's Republic of China, by Order No. 6 of the President of the People's Republic of China on April 27, 2018 [CLI Code] CLI.1.313974(EN), https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2015-12/28/content_5029899.htm.

53 Jie, *supra* note 49.

54 Bakhtiar Khan, *Trade between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics: Prospects, Issues and Way Forward*, 18:1 J. MANAGERIAL SCI. 48-74 (2024).

used for infrastructure and trade and not against India.

6. Conclusion

Since the US withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 2021, China may have been interested in filling this vacuum. China-Afghanistan relations have transformed from “diplomatic indifference” to a “strategic partnership” in the last few years. One of the reasons is the importance of the Wakhan Corridor. The Wakhan Corridor is an important linking point for transnational trade and investment between China, Pakistan, Tajikistan and India. Given that China’s presence in the Wakhan Corridor is both challenge and opportunity for the success of the BRI, its choice will be strategic partnership with Afghanistan. Both China and Afghanistan can develop strategic relations by the peaceful cooperation in the Wakhan Corridor which will be beneficial for Central Asia and the Eurasian continent as a whole.

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