

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



December 03, 2017

SCO Must Play a Role in Peacebuilding in Afghanistan

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah attended Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Russia. During the meeting on Friday, he called on the SCO members states to support Afghanistan in the war against terrorism and play their role in bringing the militant groups in Afghanistan to negotiation table. He said in his statement, "We call upon SCO member states to use their leverage and contacts with armed Afghan militant groups to urge them so that they enter into intra-Afghan talks." He also called for full membership of Afghanistan in the organization.

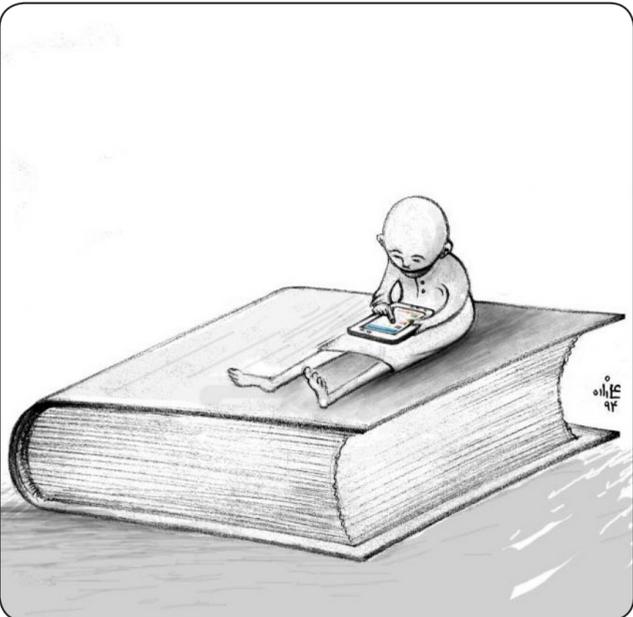
SCO is gaining importance as an organization that is aimed at promulgating trade, economic, humanitarian and security cooperation and support among the South Asian and Central Asian countries. SCO summit was basically founded in 2001 by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Afghanistan was given an observer status at the 2012 SCO summit in Beijing on June 06, 2012. Pakistan and India were, in June 2017, granted full membership status as well, while Iran and Mongolia and Belarus, like Afghanistan, have observer status in the organization. Though Afghanistan has been seeking full membership of the organization, it has not been able to do so, so far. There are hopes that SCO can play an important role in Afghanistan regarding security and economic development. Currently, Afghanistan is going through some very serious challenges regarding growing insecurity. Taliban insurgents have continued their fighting more fiercely and they have been able to gain the control of different districts in different provinces of the country. The northern parts of the country that used to be comparatively peaceful are now the main targets of the insurgents and certain districts in the north have come under their control. Even the capital Kabul has experienced some very threatening attacks in the most guarded parts of the city.

At the same time, the threats of growing number of Daesh attacks are also alarming. In order to face the dual challenge of fighting both Taliban and Daesh, Afghanistan would definitely require support from the regional countries, in particular. The SCO members can play a positive role in this regard and their dedicated attention regarding the growing insecurity in Afghanistan is of immense importance. Both Russia and China have accepted the fact that the growth of Daesh in Afghanistan can be a regional threat, and they have also emphasized on a strategy to combat this threat. If this emphasis is turned into practical steps, it would immensely support in disheartening Daesh's growth in Afghanistan.

China, in particular, can have a dominant role in the peacebuilding in Afghanistan. One of the most important support regarding security would be initiation of peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban. A serious negotiation between Afghan government and Taliban is really crucial at the moment. China can play its role in further streamlining this process and eliminate the differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan so that they are able to cooperate more closely for making negotiations possible.

China can also play its dominating role in SCO to start a formal process for a lasting peace in Afghanistan. It can involve the regional countries in this regard so that they collectively design a comprehensive support strategy to deal with the threats of terrorism in Afghanistan. Apart from assisting Afghan security forces to face the enemies they can also support Afghanistan in governance and development sectors so that they are able to pursue long-term strategies for establishing peace and tranquility. Support in the form of assistance for strengthening the weak political and social institutions in Afghanistan would also prove to be vital for solidifying Afghan government and its nascent democracy and make them capable enough to stand strong. In similar fashion, to control the threat of Taliban and to support Afghanistan in making peace talks successful, Afghanistan, to a large extent, relied on the role of Pakistan. President Ghani in the beginning of his government strived for improved relations with Pakistan and emphasized on its role in holding peace talks with Taliban. Pakistan also showed some willingness in the beginning; however, later on the developments showed that there were evident shortcomings in that regard. Therefore, the relations between both the countries, once again, took a U-turn and today they stand at a point where the hopes of a meaningful cooperation regarding security and terrorism in near future are not very bright.

It is really imperative for the regional countries to see the problem of insecurity in Afghanistan as an issue that can disturb the whole region and must cooperate so that the issue is addressed properly and on time. They seem to realize that they require acting collectively to face this threat but it is important that they must be able to put in practice comprehensive strategy to tackle the situation. Words and promises, alone, have never and would never solve the issue of terrorism and insurgency. Practical solutions are the only way out of the quagmire that can swallow the whole region in no time.



The Thucydides Trap and Sino-US Relations

By Shakir Wazir

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Thucydides, a Greek historian, who recounted the 5th century BC war between Sparta and Athens in The History of Peloponnesian War and wrote that the rising power of Athens had spawned fears in Sparta, the already established dominant power. The Sparta felt threatened by the rising power of Athens that prompted the former for waging war with the latter.

An American political scientist and Harvard University professor G. T. Allison coined the phrase "Thucydides Trap" to describe the phenomenon of conflict between a rising power and an already established dominant power.

History has witnessed these types of conflicts between the rising power and an already established dominant power of the time. With Russia being fallen out of the arena after its economy faltered leading to the collapse of the then USSR, now China, a rising power, has sent shock waves across Europe and USA. Although USA and China over the last several decades have maintained a rapprochement and the current Xi Jinping and Trump summits may be conducive to avoid the Thucydides Trap, with Trump striving to secure China's cooperation to cope with the nuclear threat of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and to rectify the imbalance in US-China trade. However this liaison may get embittered once Trump realizes that his aims could not be achieved in near term. However, the Thucydides Trap may not include Conventional war but definitely it will envisage stifling the rising economy of China and reasserting Uncle Sam's Asian Pivot.

After 9/11, relations between Washington and Beijing appeared to be rising steadily for following four years. The decision makers in US focused their attention on the looming dangers of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. They felt less bothered to view China as an actual or potential strategic competitor and hoped that, in the post 9/11 world, all the great powers would be brought together by the common dangers of terrorism and proliferation.

However, when President George W. Bush assumed office for his second term, there were signs of increasing conflicts between Washington and Beijing and increasing skepticism, on the US side at least, that the relationship and interests of the two countries were as harmonious, as had often been claimed. Alarm over the possible lifting of the European arms embargo helped to draw renewed attention to the pace and scope of China's military buildup. Frustration with stalled negotiations over North Korea's nuclear weapons program caused some observers to question whether Beijing truly shared the U.S. commitment to halting proliferation. Reports of a waxing PRC's influence in Southeast Asia stirred fears of waning U.S. influence and incipient Chinese regional hegemony. Meanwhile, evidence that China was expanding its interactions with Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East raised the specter of a new global rivalry for power and influence.

During Obama administration the relationship between USA and China was tense due to sharp differences over economic and trade issues, cyberattacking, Beijing's assertive maneuvers in the South China Sea. During election campaign, Trump seesawed between accusing China of "raping" the US on trade, threatening to walk away from America's alliances in East Asia and mulling over the idea of making a great bargain with China where US would accept China's rise as a quid pro quo if China did not threaten the status quo in Asia.

But a month after assuming the office, President Trump had alluded

that matters could get even more contentious, as his administration has vowed to put more military might in Asia and to impose high tariffs on Chinese goods. China could respond with its own befitting punitive measures. While Mr. Trump's advisers say that China has more to lose than the United States in a trade war. Visiting American businessmen were told by Chinese officials that Beijing was prepared with lists of punitive options they would take against the United States if Washington took the initiative.

A new report by a bipartisan task force of prominent China specialists has warned of dire consequences, including the possibility of a trade war or an armed skirmish, unless the United States can find a more effective way to engage China.

In Trump's administration China is considered more as a competitor than a partner. Their policies would be focused to contain China, and if needed, to confront it. USA would have to reassert herself as the real Asian power. The US will continue its attempts to exploit China's maritime disputes in South China Sea and encircle China by forming military alliances around China's periphery to galvanize resistance against China's influence in the region. It has established military alliances with a number of military significant states, including three of Asia's largest powers: Japan, India and Australia. Mr. Trump has suggested that the One China policy, under which the government of Beijing not Taiwan has been recognized by US, is not sacrosanct.

Although US has outstripped the world economically, militarily and technologically but China is moving faster to compete USA in these fields. Xi Jinping has said he wants Asians to rule Asia, which can be translated into a desire to see China rule Asia. Recently he outlined China's objectives to be a moderately prosperous country, fully modern economy and society by 2035 and a global leader by 2050. On the other hand Donald Trump's slogan "America First" indicates strong determination on the part of Donald Trump to win back the economic, political and strategic pre-eminence which the US enjoyed over the last several decades. China is investing trillion of dollars under the historic Belt and Road Initiative of which CPEC is a project which will transform China from one-ocean to two-ocean power. As China's economy is boosting so it will pursue its interests more robustly and will not bend before America. America has shown reservations on CPEC which she claims to be passing across a disputed territory.

The US retains a significant military edge over China. Its \$600 billion military budget is more than four times larger than China's. America is possessing and developing latest weapon systems. However, China is rapidly developing the capacity to confront or neutralize America's military advantage.

This rivalry would leave a profound mark on global peace and stability of this century. There is every reason to hope that Sino-US relation will follow a smoother and peaceful course. But neither history nor theory can provide assurances that it will be so. The two presidents should discourage efforts by either nation to bolster its own security that causes the other to feel less secure. This must not become a strategic rivalry, instead they should develop understanding and promote pragmatic cooperation in areas such as UN peacekeeping missions and counterterrorism operations. They should negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries of their power and influence, but also develop a shared understanding of their global roles and responsibilities to avoid falling into the so-called Thucydides Trap, the often-cited cycle of struggle between rising and established powers.

Shakir wazir is a freelance columnist based in Pakistan. He can be reached at the shakirwazir23@gmail.com

A Young State in an Uncertain World

By Nargis Kassenova

In mid-November, Kazakhstan hosted the third annual "Astana Club," a new independent and unbiased platform for dialogue among international business leaders, politicians, media representatives, and other experts on the "critical issues affecting all the countries of Eurasia." The event epitomized Kazakhstan's foreign policy over the last two decades, at a moment when that policy is set to confront unprecedented tests.

Participants in this year's Astana Club were as high-profile as they were diverse. They included representatives of leading think tanks from Europe, Asia, the United States, and the Middle East; former presidents, such as Turkey's Abdullah Gül and Slovenia's Danilo Türk; former European Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner; Indian member of parliament Shashi Tharoor; and CEO of Channel One Russia Konstantin Ernst.

The discussions took place in the Nazarbayev Centre, housed in an imposing and futuristic building designed by the renowned British architect Norman Foster. In a scene reminiscent of the intergalactic assembly in Star Wars, participants sat at a large table encircling a map of Eurasia to discuss the emerging world order, great power rivalries, sanction wars, nuclear proliferation, and regional integration projects.

This combination of status-seeking public relations and the provision of public goods that characterizes the Astana Club discussions has long been a feature of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. For example, every three years Kazakhstan hosts a Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, for which it commissioned Foster to build another imposing and futuristic building, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. Kazakhstan's leadership has also worked to place itself at the forefront of the international non-proliferation movement. And this past October, talks were held in Astana, the capital, on the Syrian crisis, with representatives of the Syrian government and some armed opposition groups in attendance - despite Kazakhstan's distance from the tragic developments in that country. This approach emerged soon after Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, when the country initiated the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, modeled after the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (now the OSCE). It reflects Kazakhstan's appreciation of the liberal world order into which it was born in 1991 - an order that, at that time, had just received a major boost, with the Soviet Union's collapse. Kazakhstan was never one to settle for being an accepted member

of the liberal world order. It wanted to be exemplary, not just joining multilateral regimes and organizations, but also making its own contribution.

That is why Kazakhstan sought the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe, which it obtained in 2010, and pursued a difficult but ultimately successful campaign to become a non-permanent UN Security Council member in 2017-2018. Kazakhstan aspires eventually to join the advanced economies in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But the international community that Kazakhstan is trying so hard to impress is undergoing fundamental change. Russia, the great power of Kazakhstan's neighborhood, has unsettled the region with its invasion of Ukraine, in which it illegally annexed Crimea and started a war in the eastern Donbas region.

Compounding the problem, it seems that the United States under President Donald Trump cannot be counted on to continue constraining Russia or underwriting the post-1945 liberal world order that it created. Having ridden to power on a wave of popular anger, Trump can't even be counted on to follow its rules.

The European Union is similarly beset by internal political challenges - including negotiations with the United Kingdom over its withdrawal from the bloc - that stem from a surge in anti-establishment and nationalist sentiment. China has sought to step into the breach of global leadership - and has been met with surprisingly strong approval from the rest of the world.

Such tectonic shifts are jarring enough for the large powers that bring them about; for smaller countries, they can be even more disorienting. Even as some welcome the demise of Western hegemony, the fact is that, for a country like Kazakhstan, unpredictability implies danger. It does not help that the emerging powers are less bound to international human rights norms and conventions, and thus less likely to attempt to enforce them.

Kazakhstan achieved independence at a time when international cooperation, free trade, and collective security were encouraged, and it has long worked to support these principles. Though Kazakhstan's government, like other young states in the region, has lagged in advancing democracy and human rights, it has at least avoided foreclosing them entirely.

For now, Kazakhstan is trying to stay the course. But if today's trends continue, it might lose direction.

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Nargis Kassenova is Director of the Central Asian Studies Center at KIMEP University in Kazakhstan.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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