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ENHANCING REGIONAL COOPERATION: EXPLORING GROUNDS FOR JOINT VENTURES AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

Khalid Taimur Akram

Center for Global and Strategic Studies (CGSS)

5th Floor Khyber 4 plaza, G-15 Markaz, Islamabad, Pakistan, infocgss@yahoo.com

The article deals with the prospects of regional cooperation among the countries of the Eurasian region and Pakistan. The research is based on prospects of connectivity and joint ventures that can enhance people-to-people contacts and academic institutional growth. The research approach used in this article is deductive (top-down approach). The research is analytical and exploratory. In the study, the author elaborated the prospects of regional cooperation via joint ventures that would enhance intellectual and academic growth in the wider region.

Keywords: cooperation; regional alignment; economic connectivity; diplomatic ties; intellectual-institutional collaboration.

In today's political and economic discourse, regional connectivity is a key catchword. It is significant for the socio-economic development of any state. The changing dynamics of regional and international political discourse allows nations to enhance cooperation in multiple fields. The world is no longer unipolar, and it has become multipolar. The multiplex civilizational patterns have encouraged countries to find common grounds for joint projects. The constructive engagement would lead nations to shared prosperity. It will help them to devise strong policies in order to tackle the common global challenges. The complex nature of regional networks requires Governments to reach across sectoral boundaries to develop cross-sectoral policies, both at the national and regional levels. To achieve this, they will need to strengthen institutional mechanisms and make better use of existing regional forums. In this regard, international academic networks can play a significant role in enhancing intellectual collaboration, cultural exchanges, and educational opportunities.

Pakistan is located at a geo-strategically important place. It lies at the interface of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Therefore,

enhancing regional collaboration with the broader Eurasian region is significant. Pakistan has a religious and cultural affinity with the Central Asian Republic (CARs). The region of Central Asia is considered one of the fastest-growing regions of the world. The countries' governments have adopted the policy of gradualism and moved towards exceptional internal transition, thereby portraying a model of more accountable and democratic nations. The transformation of policies and structural adjustments have led these nations' socio-economic development in many domains. Therefore, enhanced regional cooperation with Central Asian Republics and the Eurasian region would result as a boon for each state involved.

For increased regional connectivity and cooperation, stability in Afghanistan is the prerequisite. The country is amid chaos and instability due to its decades-long ongoing war. It has ripple effects on the adjacent countries. Pakistan has been actively playing a substantial role in the socio-economic reconstruction and peace process in Afghanistan. Due to Pakistan's strong efforts and constructive engagement, the U.S and the Taliban signed a peace deal on 29 February 2020. Pakistan's soft power policy has a primary objective to bring peace, enhance regional cooperation and facilitate socio-economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. It has been playing a pivotal role in resolving the Afghanistan crisis. The country has perused policies of cooperation and has significantly invested in capacity building and technical training programs in Afghanistan. For example, the grand economic projects, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI), and other trans-national programs require an integrated approach for implementation. Afghanistan can play an important role as a transit energy trade hub between South Asian and Central Asian countries. Therefore, restoring peace in Afghanistan is a dire need of time.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is a game-changer project for the region. Pakistan is enriched in natural endowments like minerals, five seasons, fertile agricultural land, a hardworking labor force, the world's largest and oldest canal system, and a deep-sea port of Gwadar. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the most significant, enormous, and far-reaching initiatives in this context. It is fruitfully accounting for the prospects for open market development, building mutual trust, economic integration, and fostering cultural ties. The historical friendship of China and Pakistan further accounts for a solid partnership in many other domains. The economic connectivity between both states has paved the way for enhanced strategic cooperation. Due to this project, new patterns of cooperation are emerging that are substantially contributing in enhancing people-to-people contacts, robust

diplomatic-commercial ties, and cultural exchange benefits. Hence, Gwadar port presents a great advantage for the landlocked Central Asian countries and Afghanistan to access the easy trade route via Pakistan to the warm waters. It will increase infrastructure development and cross-border facilitation regionally.

The Central Asian countries are more inclined towards the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. The role of Uzbekistan as a prominent stakeholder highlights its profound concern to bring peace to the region and resolve the Afghan conflict. Central and South Asia's regional politics and outlook have been complexing because of the huge involvement of extra-regional powers. The regions have been the battleground of power politics and superpowers. The intervention of extra-regional powers and non-state actors has limited economic and regional cooperation. However, now the dynamics of the world's political and economic discourse are changing. The world is no longer unipolar. There are more opportunities to integrate in this multipolar world due to innovative ideas and multilateral civilizational patterns.

Moreover, there is a substantial untapped existing potential for the wider Eurasian region and Pakistan. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) Free Trade agreement has enormous opportunities to engage the regional states. Economic connectivity always leads towards a more united framework of cooperation in many other domains. In this regard, Eurasian Economic Union holds exceptional prospects for Pakistan to become a member as the country has vast economic potential. The Iran-Pakistan railway line also provides significant opportunities to Turkey and Eurasian region for import and exports. Identifying diverse routes for Iran-Pakistan railway line would give the landlocked Eurasian nations a new impetus to increase their trade activity via this railway this connectivity. Furthermore, the arrangements of broader regional integration include Quadrilateral Transact Trade Agreement (QTTA), Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) 1000 power project, Uzbekistan-Pakistan railway line from Termez to Peshawar, and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTA).

Belarus is one of the closest allies of Pakistan. After the Soviet's Union disintegration, the country has emerged as a sovereign state. Since the independence, it has opted for a gradual transformative path, characterized by robust civil administration, effective structural reforms, and a modest expansion of the public-private sector. The country has experienced successful and prosperous phases in increasing economic and diplomatic cooperation. Belarusian incumbent administration under the leadership of His Excellency, Alexander Lukashenko, has introduced the best framework for

the state's administration, reforms, and pervasive grounds for economic cooperation with the rest of the world.

One of the main factors that Belarus adopted was the greater economic collaboration and good friendly relationship with other neighboring states. Its unique economic model has provided an ample number of opportunities to establish strong ties with Pakistan. The ratio of trade activities (import and exports) has also fostered. In present times, the bilateral relationship of both countries has grown at an unprecedented level. Both countries are moving towards cooperation and enhancing the sphere of connectivity. In this regard, several Memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and agreements have been signed for multiple fields. For instance, science and technology, imports-exports, trade-investment, and higher education academic exchanges.

Under this discussion, it is clear that the transforming dynamics of changing world order and cooperative patterns are significant to analyze for joint ventures. Joint ventures are now being used as a strategic option in mature economies. A robust framework for shared cooperation, regional engagements, and academic collaboration would facilitate win-win and reciprocal integration for all countries involved. In this context, a consolidated regional framework is needed for result-oriented diplomatic and economic programs. The promotion of regional cooperation towards global markets with flexible relations between regional countries is the main aspect of open regionalism and cooperation.

The regional geo-economic and geo-political circumstances for deep integration demands practical measures for infrastructure development. It includes cross-border economic activity, roads, highways, railways, highways, pipelines, sea/air/dry ports, etc. Apart from that, countries are perusing the soft power policies to achieve their desired goals and enhance the soft power projection.

In this aspect, the soft components include harmonization and coordination of cross-border policies. For example, establishing legal and regulatory frameworks for trade activities, custom-tariff policies, border clearance, cultural exchanges, academic cooperation, tourism, etc. The strategic objective of connectivity must be the expansion of trade and exploring joint avenues of cooperation. The regional economic cooperation appears to have reduced the income gaps between countries because of convergence and common grounds.

Regional integration helps countries to overcome gaps, division, and challenges. In this aspect, academic/intellectual institutional development, and facilitation are significant in recent times. A common framework for education policy and practice will help to foster collaboration and hasten progress towards regional convergence.

Culture and academic cooperation play a central role in this process. A culture is a valuable tool for advancing on the road to integration. It can make a decisive contribution to strengthening cohesion, dialogue, and social understanding among the countries, which is an intrinsic factor to counter common global threats. In this aspect, academic/intellectual facilitation is needed among countries to promote peace, dialogue, and accept cultural and civilizational diversities.

Collaboration in the academic and educational sectors would do wonders to foster the process of regional integration. In this aspect, Eurasian countries and Pakistan can devise relevant policy mechanisms to provide opportunities for joint ventures and student exchange programs. These tremendous educational chances would increase people-to-people connectivity, and soft power projection, cultural exchanges, tourism, and countries can learn from each other in a better way.

Furthermore, countries can identify grounds for mutual interests to increase their efforts to strengthen multilateral ties. Awareness programs, teacher-students exchange programs, scholarships, international summits, webinars, seminars, and relevant literature can help these regional countries to collaborate.

The cooperation that began with economic assistance can lead to strategic partnership and collaboration in many other fields. Therefore, exploring grounds for joint ventures and enhanced academic networks in the region would benefit all states. In this context, operationalization of practical policy options could pave the way for new avenues of economic cooperation, political integration, harmony, peaceful coexistence, respect, and lead towards multilateral regional alliance to an unprecedented level.

CHINA—JAPAN—SOUTH KOREA'S TRILATERAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COOPERATION WITHIN ASEAN-CENTERED INSTITUTIONS (2009-2019)

M. V. Galimov

*National Research University Higher School of Economics
Myasnikitskaya Street, 20, 101000, Moscow, Russia, mvgalimov@yandex.ru*

In the article the of role ASEAN-centered institutions for China-Japan-South Korea interaction and cooperation on disaster management is analyzed. Based on official secondary data and the method of forecasting by analogy the author presents evidence of ASEAN providing the three countries with a testing ground for interaction as well as with a possible example to imitate. In turn, ASEAN institutions benefit from the trilateral