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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Mon, 05/30/2016 - 07:26

Paper No. 6120

Dated 30-May-2016

By Dr Subhash Kapila

The Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement signed in Tehran on May 23 2016 between India, Iran and Afghanistan during PM Modi's Iran visit signals the dawn of a new power- play though essentially economic initially, but with geopolitical implications.

The Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement signals the commencement of a new geopolitical power-play in which seemingly India, Iran and Afghanistan are willing participants cooperating for regional economic gains and connectivity, notwithstanding that such an initiative would rattle China and Pakistan.

This Agreement signals possibly a new trend for this Century where geoeconomics will tend to predominate regional cooperative mechanisms initially, and where the strategic underpinnings will ultimately surface on full maturity of the initiating steps.

The Chah Bahar Agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan with India in the lead provides a stark contrast to the China-led China Pakistan Economic Corridor whose main determinant is not geoeconomics but outright strategic foreplay to keep-out or limit India's and the United States' influence from Greater South West Asia.

Geopolitically, the Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement knits together the two civilizational regional powers, India and Iran, with geostrategically important Afghanistan, which again historically has deep linkages with both India and Iran. These linkages pre-date by centuries the emergence of Pakistan, which shares 95% of its borders with India, Iran and Afghanistan and with all three of them Pakistan can be said to be not on the best terms of good neighbourliness.

The Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement signed by the leaders of India, Iran and Afghanistan focusses on the development of Iran's Chah Bahar Port as an economic hub from which will take off the 'Transit and Transport Corridor' enabling both India and Iran to access Afghanistan which in turn gains access to the Indian Ocean bypassing troublesome Pakistan. The Transit and Trade Corridor will also provide India with access to Central Asian energy and trade markets and further access to Russia and Europe. Iran too will similarly gain.

The Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement has significant geoeconomics, geopolitical and geostrategic contours which are briefly analysed in that order since it is the economics of the Agreement to begin with which currently outweighs the potential or underlying political and strategic significances. The last two named can be expected to be a natural corollary once the economics germinates and gets firmly embedded in the Tripartite Relationship.

Geoeconomically, the Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement meshes together India's booming economic growth and solid economy with hunger for energy and mineral resources with Iran's vast energy resources and the millions of tons of mineral deposits of Afghanistan. Therefore, strong economic interdependencies exist between India, Iran and Afghanistan which can fully materialise with the "speedy construction and development" of Chah Bahar Port and related infrastructure for which India has committed \$ 500 million.

India has earmarked \$200 million for completion of two terminals and five berths at Chah Bahar port. India has earmarked \$ 300 million for port development and related infrastructure. The Trade and Transit Corridor will run from Chah Bahar to Zaranj on the Iran-Afghan border which is already connected by a 135 miles Indian-built road to the Afghan radial network enabling access to Russia and Europe.

Geopolitically, strong political ties have always existed between India, Iran and Afghanistan which got subsumed by United States military intervention in Afghanistan and its resultant American pandering of Pak Army's agenda and also United States sanctions on Iran. With USA finally disillusioned with Pakistan's duplicity and with normalisation of US-Iran relations, one can expect greater political momentum in India-Iran-Afghanistan political dynamics. Already, understandings have been reached between the three nations on exchange of political and terrorism intelligence. It needs to be highlighted that Pakistan state-sponsored terrorism equally plagues India, Iran and Afghanistan.

Geostrategically, not explicit but potentially implicit, in this significant Tripartite Agreement is that robust strategic convergences exist between India, Iran and Afghanistan manifested in the India-Iran Strategic Partnership and the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership agreements already existing. This dimension can logically only increase as China has yet to prove its credentials as a responsible stakeholder in the region.

The China-Pakistan Axis and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor linking Xingjiang with the Pakistani port of Gwadar only 72 Kms away from Cha Bahar Port raises strong strategic concerns for India, Iran and Afghanistan notwithstanding China's overtures to Iran and Afghanistan.

The above should also be a strategic concern for the United States with Pakistan soon hosting Chinese Navy presence at Gwadar Naval Base detrimental to American security interests in Greater South West Asia.

Afghanistan being provided an alternative access to the Indian Ocean other than unreliable blackmailing Pakistan would greatly reduce American challenges being currently faced in Afghanistan because of the 'Pakistan Factor'. This should prompt the United States to put its full political and economic weight behind India's speedy execution of the Chah Bahar Port Project and related infrastructure. Japan has already expressed interest to India for participation in this direction.

While leaders of India, Iran and Afghanistan have been highlighting and stressing on the economics and trade advantages of Chah Bahar Port as a regional economic hub and example of regional cooperation and integration, a point repeatedly stressed by the Iranian President, a survey of the Iranian media on the subject indicates highlighting of 'India wants to challenge China's power in Central and South Asia through the Chah Bahar Port.' Some other Iranian media reports highlight that the Tripartite Agreement and India's commitment and investments in Chah Bahar Port will ring alarm bells in Islamabad, China and Riyadh. In Iran therefore there is consciousness that the Tripartite Agreement has great potential strategic significance and that should be a welcome sign for India.

Iranian President Rouhani on signing of the Tripartite Agreement declared that "Today is an important and historical day of development of relations between the three countries" and further stressed that "From Tehran, New Delhi and Kabul, this is a crucial message....that the path to progress for regional countries goes through joint cooperation and utilising regional opportunities." Is Pakistan listening to the Iranian President's advice earlier repeated in Pakistan during his visit there?

Afghan President Ghani lauded the Chah Bahar Port project and the connected Transit and Transport Corridor which opens immense opportunities for economic development of Afghanistan. Expressing his sentiments, the Afghan President asserted that "Our will starts from Chah Bahar today but its end will be an all-out comprehensive development and economic-cultural cooperation,"

Indian PM Modi declared at the same occasion that "Today the nature of global engagement requires an attitude more suitable to this century and not the mind-set of the century gone-by." These references were obviously aimed at China and Pakistan hell-bent on creating regional turbulence as opposed to regional economic cooperation.

Concluding one would like to highlight PM Modi's declaring the signing of the Tripartite Agreement as "This Agreement can change the

course of history”. Rightly said, Mr Prime Minister, but the final and crucial responsibility to change the course of history through the Chah Bahar Tripartite Agreement rests squarely on the shoulders of India which under your dynamic leadership should fast-track the completion in record time of the Chah Bahar Project unlike BJP Prime Minister Vajpayee who let the project languish.

The contemporaneous strategic picture unfolding is propitious for India to take the lead in signalling the new power-play as a pivotal player in ensuring the stability and security of Greater South West Asia. India must not shy away from shouldering geopolitical and associated burdens thrust on it as a ‘Pivotal Emerging Power’ and not be distracted out of concerns for China’s sensitivities.

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