



International North-South Transport Corridor Opportunities, Challenges, and the Role of Afghanistan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received date: 15/May/2024	<p>This research paper examines the opportunities, challenges, and the role of Afghanistan in the international North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the potential benefits and obstacles associated with the corridor, with a specific focus on Afghanistan's involvement. A systematic literature review methodology is employed to gather and analyze relevant studies and used focus group discussion for primary data, analyzed by thematically analysis to know in-depth the role of Afghanistan.</p> <p>The findings of this review highlight numerous opportunities stemming from the INSTC, including enhanced regional connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic growth. However, the study also identifies various challenges that need to be addressed, such as security concerns, infrastructure development, bureaucratic complexities, and geopolitical factors affecting the corridor's successful implementation.</p> <p>The implications of this study emphasize the importance of leveraging the INSTC for Afghanistan's economic development and its role in regional integration. By effectively addressing the identified challenges, Afghanistan can capitalize on its strategic location to become a vital transit hub, promoting trade between Europe, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean region.</p> <p>It is essential to recognize the limitations of this review. The study relies on existing literature, and the findings are contingent upon the quality and availability of the reviewed studies. Additionally, the dynamic nature of the geopolitical landscape and ongoing developments could impact the implementation and effectiveness of the INSTC, thus influencing the findings of this review.</p> <p>In conclusion, this review sheds light on the opportunities, challenges, and the role of Afghanistan in the international North-South Transport Corridor. The findings underscore the need to address the challenges to fully harness the potential benefits of the corridor, fostering Afghanistan's economic growth and contributing to regional integration.</p>
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Introduction

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) having 7200 kilometers length(Narendra Sharma, 2021, P. 55) was established by India, Iran, and Russia when they signed an agreement in St. Petersburg laying out a vision for a North-South Transport Corridor.in 2000.(Regine A. Spector, 2002) it came into force in 2002 after ratification by all the three countries.(Najeeb Ullah and Muhammad Abbas Brohi, 2018, P.101) The founders of the INSTC, especially India, have two expectations from this Corridor. First, India wants to reach to natural resources of Central Asia, and second, it wants to find a way to Europe through INSTC. India also develop Chabahar port in Iran bypassing Pakistan to improve its relation with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Afghanistan playing very important role in INSTC, because Afghanistan connects India to Central Asia through Chabahar Port and Connects Central Asian countries to India through this Port and Corridor. As an important country in South Asia with its geopolitical and geo strategic location, Afghanistan can bring more facilities and

opportunities for the International North-South Transport Corridor. Throughout this paper, we discuss the role of Afghanistan in INSTC and benefits of INSTC to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, located at the crossroads of the INSTC, plays a vital role in realizing the potential benefits of this transport corridor. The country's strategic positioning provides a gateway between Central and South Asia, offering opportunities for trade expansion and transit facilitation.

The INSTC offers significant opportunities for enhanced regional connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic growth. By providing an alternative transport route, it opens up avenues for increased cross-border trade, reduced transportation costs, and improved access to markets for participating countries. Moreover, the corridor has the potential to stimulate infrastructure development and promote regional integration, fostering economic cooperation and stability.

The development of the International North-South Transport corridor (INSTC) as a key tool to expand trade and economic cooperation between regions. The project is expanded to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Oman, Tajikistan, Syria, Turkey, and Ukraine. This transportation network connects India and Iran with Central Asia and Eurasian countries through roads, railways, and water. The International North-South Transport Corridor is aimed to decrease the time and cost of the transportation of goods. Nowadays, transporting goods and cargo from India to Russia takes 40 days. However, by the operationalization of the International North-South Transport Corridor, it will reduce to 25 days. Estimates show that INSTC will bring the facility to transport 20-30 million tons of products and goods every year (Chatterjee & Singh, 2020, pp. 195-196).

“The INSTC proposed movement of goods from Mumbai to Bandar Abbas in Iran by sea, from Bandar Abbas by road, and then from Bandar-e-Anzali to Astrakhan, a Caspian port in the Russian Federation, through the Caspian Sea, and after that from Astrakhan to other regions of the Russian Federation and further to Europe by Russian railways” (Khan, 2021, pp. 54–55). The project's main objective is to develop multilateral cooperation and trade through road, rail, and sea among all member states. The project was developed when the founder states thought to take help from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey, and they pointed out this issue on January 18, 2012, in a meeting in Delhi (Chatterjee, 2018, p. 609).

The potential INSTC freight traffic could reach 15–25 million tons by 2030. Container traffic could be increased by 20x, requiring investments in infrastructure. The INSTC will benefit the economies of Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and South Asia. Subsequently, the INSTC has three main routes: the Western Route along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, the Trans-Caspian Route using ferry and feeder container lines across the Caspian Sea, and the Eastern Route along the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. These routes offer different modes of transport and levels of infrastructure development. (Evgeny Y. Vinokurov and Arman Ahunbaev, 2022)

Successful implementation of the INSTC and the development of the Chabahar Port in Iran are crucial for India's connectivity with Russia, Eurasia, and landlocked Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. India is committed to building a railway track from Chabahar to Zahedan.

The International North-South Transport Corridor's member states have faced political, logistical, and other challenges for twenty years. There are tremendous economic opportunities that will be received through the INSTC. Do not let these countries give up. According to experts, its advantage over other routes is a shorter and safer transport distance. It not only significantly reduces the delivery time, but also makes it approximately 30% cheaper. (Konstantin Markelov and others, 2022, P.2)

Afghanistan is a part of INSTC through Chabahar Port, and INSTC plays an important role in decreasing the time and cost of the transportation of goods; therefore, analyzing this topic is important.

Research Questions

- 1- What are the Opportunities and Challenges for North-South Transport Corridor?
- 2- What is the role of Afghanistan in North-South Transport Corridor?

Research Objective

The research objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive review of the opportunities and challenges within the international North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and examine the specific role of Afghanistan. The primary focus is to know the opportunities, challenges and the Role of Afghanistan in INSTC. The objective is to provide a thorough understanding of the opportunities that the corridor presents, the challenges that need to be addressed, and the role Afghanistan can play in promoting regional connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic growth. By reviewing existing literature and analyzing the role of Afghanistan through thematic analysis, this study aims to generate valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers interested in the development and utilization of the INSTC.

Literature Review

Various Types of research works have examined the International North-South Transport Corridor. Research by international organizations explores the possibility of integration the INSTC into existing international

transport corridors architecture and Euro-Asian transport linkages. These researches give technical information revealing the arrangements of the transport routes of the member countries. (UNECE, 2012, 2020; UNESCAP, 2017, 2019)

Evgeny Y. Vinokurov and Arman Ahunbaev (2022) Concludes that, The INSTC can become an economic development corridor and Implementation of transport infrastructure projects will reduce transit time and costs. The development of international transport corridors (ITCs) encourages the construction of dry ports and industrial parks and The INSTC will promote economic growth and increase welfare.

Elaheh Koolae and Abed Norouzi (2022) Finds that Cooperation between member countries in the North-South Corridor can lead to greater economic and political cooperation. Facilitating transportation can improve trade ties and reduce regional threats. The INSTC can lead to an economic union and increased regional talks. The North-South Corridor can help resolve regional countries' disputes.

Sanchita Chatterjee (2018) argues that, The Chabahar Port in Iran is an important strategic transit location in the INSTC for India, Iran and Afghanistan. It offers an alternative to the busy port of Bander Abbas. India has been offered the opportunity to develop the Chabahar port, which will provide access to land-locked Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. The Agreement signed between India and Iran in 2016 for the INSTC and Chabahar Port will help ensure India's connectivity with Russia and Eurasia. India is also committed to building a railway track from Chabahar to Zahedan.

A research paper titled (Investigation and Identification of Variables of Cost and Time Affecting International Freight Transportation in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC)) analyze the cost breakdown for the case study route of India (Kandla Port) to Kazakhstan (Aktau Port) based on detailed tariffs and rates associated with each logistics activity in each ring of the chain and the study demonstrated how the cost breakdown structure can help managers identify practical solutions to reduce transit cost and time. (Mohammadreza Farshidnejad and Habibollah Javanmard, 2022).

According to Rogers (2015) the INSTC has been estimated to save \$2,500 per 15 tons of goods compared to the conventional corridor.

A review of the literature shows that significant research has been conducted on the INSTC introductions, technical and economic aspects, and the role of India, Russian, Iran, and Central Asia countries. However, none of this research has examined the role of Afghanistan in INSTC. Therefore, this paper examines the Afghanistan's Role in the International North-South Transport Corridor.

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the opportunities and challenges in the international North-South Transport Corridor. The findings emphasize the potential for enhanced regional connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic growth. However, security concerns, infrastructure limitations, bureaucratic complexities, and geopolitical factors pose significant challenges to the corridor's successful implementation. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial for Afghanistan to leverage its strategic location and fulfill its role as a vital transit hub along the INSTC.

Theoretical frame work

We used the economic interdependence theory for this research, because economic interdependence creates a global market where goods, products and jobs can flow freely across borders. This increased cross-border interaction promotes international relations and an efficient trading system among economies. Also, we used liberalism aspect of economic interdependence. Liberalism posits that interdependence reduces conflict it builds cooperation and deters violence and INSTC playing this role perfectly.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was employed, combining focus group discussions and a systematic literature review.

Systematic Literature Review:

A systematic literature review methodology was used to gather and analyze relevant studies related to the INSTC. Databases such as JESTOR, Google scholar, ACM Digital Library, Science Direct were searched using specific keywords and criteria.

Focus Group Discussions:

Focus group discussions were conducted to gather primary data and gain in-depth insights into the role of Afghanistan in the INSTC.

Participants were selected based on their expertise and involvement in the transport corridor or related domains. A focus group discussion guide was developed to structure the discussions and elicit valuable perspectives. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected from the focus group discussions. Themes and patterns emerged from the analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of Afghanistan in the INSTC.

Results:

Table 1

Code	Themes	Sub-themes
T1	Importance of INSTC	Economic significance for member states
		Afghanistan's need for seaport access and international markets
		Connectivity to Indian and European markets via INSTC
T2	Afghanistan as Economic Hub	Connecting South Asia, Central Asia, Europe
		Stability in the Region
T3	Infrastructure Development	Resolution of Interstate Problems
		Focus on Infrastructural Development
T4	Regional Economic Relations	Promotion of Prosperity and Stability
		Afghanistan as a Pivot Country

The Above table stated according to the participants, one participant narrated that the International North-South Corridor holds significant importance for the member states within this corridor, particularly for Afghanistan. As a landlocked country, Afghanistan requires access to seaports and international markets facilitated by the INSTC, enabling connections to Indian and European markets. Few participants stated that Afghanistan could serve as a pivotal economic hub, linking South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe through this corridor, thereby enhancing stability in the region.

The majority of the participants suggests that, it is imperative for the member states of this corridor to set aside their interstate issues, emphasizing the need for civil governments to focus on developing infrastructures along this corridor. The experts argue that fostering regional economic relations and trade among neighboring countries can lead to increased prosperity and stability. Afghanistan, positioned as a pivotal country, is seen as capable of catalyzing this opportunity for the region.

Opportunities and Challenges of INSTC

All countries involved in the INSTC can benefit, but three countries, India, Iran, and Russia, the founder of this project, have more advantages in the INSTC. The INSTC brings economic and geopolitical opportunities and challenges for all member states.

1- The Opportunities

The founders of this International Corridor, especially India, have two expectations from Central Asian countries. First, India wants to reach to natural resources of Central Asia. Second, India wants to find a way to Europe through Central Asia using the INSTC. For this purpose, India is investing in Chabahar port (cost \$150) to connect itself to a great extent with Central Asia through 'Zaranj Delaram in Afghanistan.' India also invested in constructing and paving roads that connect the major cities of Afghanistan, such as the Zaranj - Delaram (235 km) road; the Zaranj - Malik (22 km) road. The roadway transport connects the Chabahar port with the rail network in Iran, through which India can be connected to Central Asia and Europe. These infrastructures will cause the exports of products and goods, especially energy, from rich natural resources' Central Asia to Iran and India' (Chatterjee, 2018, pp. 610-11). Currently, India needs to depend on very long, expensive ways of China, Europe, and Iran to reach Central Asia. Therefore, India thinks about the alternative which should be cheaper, shorter, and safer. The INSTC is a better alternative for India because in comparison to Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, it is shorter and cheaper. Through Suez Canal, it takes 45-60 days to transport goods, and it is also expensive while the INSTC takes 25-30 for transportation of goods. Indian government thinks the INSTC would connect it with Central Asia and Russia by sidestepping Pakistan. This route will also help India transport its goods and products at a meager cost to European countries. Furthermore, it will create the possibility that India's products can get the upper hand due to their lower price and short conveyance time (Ghiasi & Muniraju, 2019, pp. 41-42).

The International North-South Transport Corridor has strategically significant for India to connect with Central Asian and Eurasian countries with rich natural resources. It can bring India the facility to trade with Russia and Europe and reach Afghanistan without touching Pakistan. India will invest \$635 million in Chabahar port as the alternative to Gwadar port which is part of the CPEC project. India through INSTC can find a good market for its products and increases its influence on Central Asian countries to balance the BRI projects such as 'China- Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC).

Russia assumes that the INSTC is a 'multimodal route' and can transport passengers and products between India, Iran, Russia, and Gulf states. Russia has multi-dimensions interests in the International North-South Corridor, and it will take the benefits from the opportunities that the INSTC will provide. Russia sees the

INSTC as an alternative to the 'Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus- Asia (TRACECA).' This Corridor belongs to the European Union, and it was established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The TRACECA Corridor connects Europe and the South Caucasus with Asian countries without any connection with the Russian territory (Sahakyan, 2020). Moscow assumed that with rising of China, the INSTC would create an excellent opportunity for the region, and China could invest in this Corridor, but China has made its initiatives (The Belt and Road Initiatives). Currently, Russia hopes that the project will go ahead with India's economic growth, and India will invest more in this Corridor as an alternative to the BRI's projects (Sahakyan, 2020). Russia is involved in Belt and Road Initiative, but it has a secondary role there. China leads the BRI, and Russia seeks to find an alternative to it. Therefore, INSTC can fulfill its ambition and let Russia balance its power with China in the region. If the member states of the INSTC solve the problems ahead of launching of this project, it will compete with the BRI of China in the region (Chalikyan & Tashjian, 2021).

After removing sanctions on Iran, investors will find opportunities to invest and complete the remaining parts of the INSTC. India has expressed its interest by investing in Chabahar port, and other countries will also take their roles after removing sanctions on Iran. Iran has become a bridge between the west and the East, and it is because of access to the Caspian Sea in the North, the Oman Sea, and the Persian Gulf in the South. Iran is located in the central of the International North-South Transport Corridor, and it connects the South with the North. Iranian railways published information that during 2018, above the 253000 tons of freight transported between Iran and Azerbaijan in the Astara rail border in Iran and 4094 wagons carried it. Despite the economic sanctions of the United States on Iran, the transportation of these freights can be a great success to Iran. Completing the INSTC and removing the sanctions will help Iran increase its GDP and decrease its reliance on oil exports (Pourtajrishi, 2019). Iran can benefit from India's investment in Chabahar port and INSTC. While on one hand the INSTC helps India to achieve its strategic aims in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Eurasian countries, on the other hand, as Chalikyan and Tashjian argue, that Iran also pursues its interests in Central Asia against influences of Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Chalikyan & Tashjian, 2021).

Central Asia that connects Asia with Europe has geopolitical importance for regional and extra-regional powers. The big powers have interests in Central Asia due to its rich natural resources. Central and South Asia have had connections for three thousand years, and historically relations caused the geopolitically and economically linkage of the two regions. These relations have entailed the silk route through which Northern India the Parthian, China, Central Asia, and the Roman Empire were connected (Khan, 2021, p. 54). Central Asian countries can get benefits from the opportunities of the INSTC. They want to connect with other parts of the world, especially with South Asia, to find a good market for their natural resources. As the world's fourth largest energy consumer, India can be an excellent market for the Central Asian countries' natural resources. Central Asian countries are rich for their natural resources such as petroleum, Uranium, and natural gas, meeting India's energy requirements. Central Asian countries can also benefit from the developments of India's information technology. These opportunities can grow when a fast and cheap INSTC project connects these two areas. (Chatterjee & Singh, 2020).

The South Caucasus countries (Azerbaijan and Armenia) can also play a key role and benefit from the INSTC project. Azerbaijan invested in the Rasht (Azerbaijan)- Iran railway, the main 'missing link' of the International North-South Transport Corridor. The ambassador of India in Iran declared that India has decided to connect Armenia with Chabahar port (Chalikyan & Tashjian, 2021). All member countries of the International North-South Transport Corridor can get advantages from the opportunities this Corridor will provide, but all these countries should stay committed and invest in this Corridor as per their capabilities.

2- Challenges

Besides economic opportunities, some challenges pose threats to the International North-South Transport Corridor, such as the Indian financial distresses, the United States sanctions against Iran, CPEC, and other technical issues.

Indian economic distresses: India is the key member and investor of the International North-South Corridor. India has pledged to invest in the Chabahar port as a part of INSTC. The prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, in May 2018, signed the agreement with Afghanistan and Iran for further development in Chabahar port, and he promised to invest more than \$500 million in this port. However, the economic experts and elites in India and abroad argue that India might not be able to fulfill its promises due to its economic woes. Despite India's economic growth rate being above 7%, it is facing economic woes. The fast-growing population, crumbling of infrastructures, inflation, corruption, and deficits in large budgets have caused the slow down of India's economic growth. The financial problems of India have raised many questions, and critics argue that with these economic conditions, India might not be able to invest in big projects. India will invest in Chabahar port in the coming years, but any economic problems in India will cause to threaten this project (Ghiasi & Muniraju, 2019, p. 42).

Technical and geopolitical factors: The technical and geopolitical factors have caused the INSTC project's construction process to face challenges. The main technical problem is the slow process for making required infrastructures. It is all due to the absence of political and financial support for the INSTC. Unlike the one belt, one road initiative (BRI), which has economic force by China, the INSTC doesn't have financial institutions. The INSTC has faced a lack of long-term strategy and receives financial support from member countries and Asian Development Bank (ADB). Other technical and bureaucratic issues also exist before the INSTC, such as lack of transportation laws, insurance, security of cargos, coverage, and others (Chalikyan & Tashjian, 2021).

Sanctions on Iran: The imposition of sanctions on Iran by 5+1 countries creates threats and uncertainty for the International North-South Transport Corridor. Due to these sanctions, there are possibilities that the Iranian economy will not be able to resist and stay sustainable for a long time (Ghiasi & Muniraju, 2019, p. 42). The US has imposed sanctions against Iran since 1979, after the seizing of the US embassy in Iran (U.S. Department of State Iran Sanctions, 2021). Besides the geopolitical and technical challenges, the INSTC also faces these sanctions from the US and the member states of the project are worried about the secondary sanctions by the US, which can impose threats to their investment in the INSTC in Iran (Chalikyan & Tashjian, 2021).

CPEC: The joining of Afghanistan with CPEC may create challenges for the future of the Chabahar port. Afghanistan has access to the sea through Chabahar port by a trilateral agreement between Afghanistan- India-Iran. After the inauguration of Chabahar port, Afghanistan shifted its large numbers of cargo traffic from Karachi port to Bandar Abbas and Chabahar in Iran. After joining with CPEC, Afghanistan will receive some economic opportunities and projects, for instance, "Turkmenistan Afghanistan-Pakistan energy transmission line and a motorway or rail connection from Peshawar in Pakistan to Kunduz in Afghanistan, motorway project between Peshawar and Kabul, a road link between Torkham and Kabul to join an existing road with Pakistan, railway lines already under consideration include one linking Pakistan's Landi-Kotal with Afghanistan's Jalalabad and another from Pakistan's Chaman to Afghanistan's Spin Boldak" (Kaushik, 2019, pp. 257-58). With investments in Chabahar port in Iran, India is concerned that by joining Afghanistan with CPEC, this port will lose its significance and undermine the INSTC.

Role of Afghanistan in INSTC

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will connect India through Iran with Eurasia, Russia, and Europe. During a meeting in Azerbaijan, India has proposed and discussed with all members of the Corridor about the inclusion of the Chabahar port in the INSTC. By investing in Chabahar port, India and Iran will be connected to Central Asia through Afghan territory (Chaudhury, 2021).

The Chabahar port, due to its strategic transit location, has a significant position in the International North-South Transport Corridor and can be an alternative for avoiding the rush in Bandar Abbas port in Iran (Chatterjee, 2018, p. 11). Afghanistan, India, and Iran signed agreements for trilateral cooperation in this port. These three countries can cooperate in the Chabahar port. Still, Chabahar is a regional gift for all countries to expand their relations and work for their national economic and political well-being. Chabahar port is located in the Baluchistan and Sistan province of Iran, and it has two handles and ten berths. Chabahar connects India and Iran through Afghanistan with Central Asian countries to trade and transportation goods, oil, and gas. As mentioned above, not only can Afghanistan, India, and Iran get an advantage from Chabahar port, but land lock Central Asian Republics can also reach themselves to Sea through Chabahar port (Ali, 2020, p. 8).

At the present time, the economic and strategic significance and implications of Chabahar port are unclear. However, one thing is clear that Iran can have quick access to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. The improvements in Chabahar port can directly impact Bandar Abbas port and reduce the burden on this port. This is a perfect signal for Afghanistan and Central Asian countries because Bandar Abbas port is responsible for carrying transport of Afghanistan, Central Asian republics, and Iran. The three shortest dual ways connect Chabahar port to the Central Asian Countries. The first way is from Chabahar port to Melak- Delaram city of Zaranj province and then to Mazar-e- Sharif city in Afghanistan and following that Termez, Uzbekistan. Second route is from Chabahar to Bamiyan, then to *Faryab province* in Afghanistan and after that to Turkmenistan. The third route which connects Port Chabahar with Central Asia Countries, starts from Chabahar port to Mashhad-Sarakhas in Iran and then to Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. From the above mentioned three dual routes, the first two are crossing from Afghanistan. It is an excellent opportunity for Afghanistan to play a key role and benefit from these two regions' connection and transactions. India plans to build a 900 KM railway from Iran to the Bamiyan province of Afghanistan. In addition, the external Administrator of India has a plan to build the railway toward the Afghanistan side and build a railway from Mashhad of Iran to the Turkmen border (Ali, 2020, pp. 8-9). India also invested in constructing the Zaranj- Delaram 235 KM highway and built the 22 KM road from Zaranj to Malik, which was completed in 2009 (Chatterjee, 2018, pp. 610-11). Implementing such projects in Afghanistan can help this country rebuild 'Industrial developments' (Ali, 2020, p. 9), which will bring prosperity for the region and as a whole for the Chabahar project and the International North-South Transport Corridor.

Pakistan uses the port Gwadar for transactions and trade with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and China. Still, it has deprived India of using the Gwadar port for Afghanistan and Central Asia transactions. According to 'the Afghan-Pak Trade and Transit accord,' Pakistan permits the Afghan trucks and goods to the Gwadar port, but it doesn't allow the trucks to transport Indian products and goods to Afghanistan. Chabahar port can be an excellent alternative to Gwadar port for the Transportation of Indian goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia. It reduces the expenses by around a third and develops the business between these countries. Therefore, Afghanistan can play a key role in the connectivity of India with and with Central Asian countries through Chabahar port (Ali, 2020, p. 10).

Despite playing the key role from Afghanistan, there are some obstacles within this country. These obstacles impose threats for the Chabahar project and the INSTC. For instance, the trilateral project of the railway between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan impact the Chabahar port. This multi-billion project of the railway will comprise 573 KM, which will join Peshawar to Kabul city then to Mazar-e- Sharif, and following that to Uzbekistan. The representatives from all three countries have signed a proposal, seeking a \$4.8 billion loan from the international financial organizations for developing the railway project. In December 2020, during a high-ranking meeting, the Prime minister of Pakistan discussed Uzbekistan's transport minister about the rail project's expedition and argued that Pakistan's seaport would connect the Central Asian countries with the Arabian Sea. In a meeting with the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, the commerce advisor of Pakistan said that the railway project will bring new economic opportunities in the region and will connect Central Asia and Eurasian countries with the Arabian Sea. I think the railway project between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan impact the nascent Chabahar port because Central Asian and Eurasian countries may prefer Gwadar port to Chabahar port due to its huge capacity and facilities (Jamal, 2021).

Instability and insecurity, and meanwhile the taking over of Kabul by the Taliban, is another threat for Chabahar port. Due to the tied relations of the Taliban with Pakistan and rivalry between India and Pakistan, the Taliban regime might not be ready for cooperation in the Chabahar port. Still, relations between India and the Taliban are also unclear, and there are no diplomatic relations between the two sides. Afghanistan will be on suspension in the Chabahar port project and INSTC because the representatives from the Taliban government were not be a part of a meeting of four states. The meeting happened between Iran, India, and Uzbekistan at the end 2021, and they discussed Chabahar port and INSTC (Chakraborty, 2021). The uncertain situation in Afghanistan and rivalry in the region will not help the region's economic success. Therefore, all South Asia and Central Asia countries should cooperate for a stable Afghanistan because a stable Afghanistan can provide economic opportunities and help the region become prosperous.

In short Afghanistan's role in The International North-South Transport Corridor is as follow:

5.1- India is one of the founders of The International North-South Transport Corridor and they proposed the Chabahar port to be part of this corridor which means Afghanistan is a part of 'The International North-South Transport Corridor, because Afghanistan, India and Iran signed The Chabahar project in 2016 (Ali Omidi and Gauri Noolkar-Oak, 2021, P1), through which these three countries will easily transfer goods and services to each other. Chabahar Port is the Eastern route of the INSTC (Dr. Vali Kaleji, 2023) that's why Afghanistan is a part of INSTC and playing important role by having important geopolitical and geostrategic location. The primary role is that India will connect with Afghanistan through INSTC and India can benefit from the Afghan market and implement some important Projects in this country.

5.2- Afghanistan can connect some of INSTC member's countries with China, Especially Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan. And these countries can take advantages of China's advanced market and developed economy Through INSTC.

5.3- Afghanistan will connect India to Central Asia through INSTC and India will benefit from Central Asian market and its energy resources.

Benefits of INSTC to Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a part INSTC through Chabahar port and this corridor has the following benefits for Afghanistan:

1- Through INSTC Afghanistan can easily access to some of European markets, especially Belarus 'Ukraine and Bulgarian markets and to these countries Afghanistan can expand trade and transit.

2- Through INSTC Afghanistan can connect to India. Afghanistan can expand trade with India and use Indian markets and also India can implement some Projects in Afghanistan.

3- The International North-South Transport Corridor enables lowering the transportation cost and time of goods. INSTC will provide an economic advantage of a lower capital and cost due to shorter distances covered along with faster deliveries (Surbhi Sharma, Antara Mukherjee and Arnab Roy). So, Afghanistan can use INSTC to deliver their goods to the Middle East 'Europe and other parts of South Asia by low cost and fast.

Conclusion

India, Russia, and Iran established the International North-South Transport Corridor in the 2000s. These three countries aimed to develop trade and trilateral business through this corridor. The corridor was expanded by including Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Oman, Syria, and Ukraine. This project will connect Iran and India with Central Asian and Eurasian countries by railways, roads, and Sea. Currently, India's cargo and products take 40 days to reach Russia. Member states of the International North-South Corridor aim to reduce the time and expenses of their transactional goods. By the operationalization of INSTC, the time and cost of the transaction will decrease, and the capacity of trade will increase. The International North-South Transport Corridor will reduce 40 days to 25 days, and it will increase the capacity of the transportation of goods to 20-30 million tons annually.

All member states of the International North-South Transport Corridor can get a tremendous economic advantage from the corridor. Some pioneer states such as India, Iran, and Russia besides, the economic benefits, can also pursue their political interests. Such as India with China and Russia can compete with European countries' regional projects. Despite that this corridor brings economic opportunities to the member states, some challenges pose threats to this corridor. For instance, the financial woes of India, the US sanctions on Iran, technical issues, and CPEC. By including Afghanistan through Chabahar port, the INSTC expanded and brought more economic opportunities. However, the insecurity and instability in Afghanistan is another challenge to this project. All member states of the INSTC, especially the neighbor countries of Afghanistan, should help this country for development and stability because it can bring more economic opportunities to the region due to its geostrategic location.

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