

Reviewing the Concept of ‘Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan’ for Idealizing Peaceful and Progressive Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study critically examines the concept of “romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan” as a means to promote peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan. Drawing from the Dr. Muhammad Asim’s book, this paper looks at social oneness and centuries-old shared economy of the three states, arguing that Afghanistan can be a progressive and peaceful country if it will socio-economically engage with Pakistan and Iran. Although this book suggests a jointly administrative market at tri-borderland between the three states, this review further suggest such types of markets at each tri-borderland of the Afghanistan. For example, the tri-borderlands, including those with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China also offer tremendous potential for Afghanistan’s economic growth and regional stability. Through the establishment of jointly administrative markets, Afghanistan can strengthen trade ties, facilitate cross-border investment, and foster economic cooperation. This collaboration can lead to mutual prosperity, increased connectivity, and peaceful relations. By leveraging its strategic location and partnering with neighboring countries, Afghanistan can tap into diverse markets, attract investments, and create employment opportunities. The development of shared infrastructure projects and collaborative efforts in sectors such as energy, agriculture, tourism and technology exchange can further enhance economic development and regional integration. Embracing this vision of jointly administrative markets, Afghanistan can achieve self-determination, promote regional stability, and foster prosperity for its people and the broader region.

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Introduction

Dr. Muhammad Asim’s book, “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan: A Region through the Lens of Resistive Economy”, presents an insightful exploration of the potential benefits of jointly administrative markets in tri-borderland regions involving Afghanistan. This article aims to review the concept put forth by Dr. Asim and its significance in idealizing a peaceful and progressive Afghanistan. By examining the advantages derived from these tri-borderlands and their relevance within the proposed market concept,

we can gain a deeper understanding of how Afghanistan can achieve economic growth, regional stability, and self-determination¹.

The tri-borderlands between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan; Afghanistan, Iran and Turkmenistan; Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan; and Afghanistan, China and Pakistan offer immense potential for Afghanistan's economic development and integration. Through the establishment of jointly administrative markets, Afghanistan can strengthen trade ties, facilitate cross-border investment, and foster economic cooperation with neighboring countries. This collaborative approach promotes mutual prosperity, increased connectivity, and the promotion of peaceful relations (Asghar, 2023).

Dr. Asim's book emphasizes the principles of the resistive economy, whereby Afghanistan can enhance its self-sufficiency, reduce dependency on external actors, and strengthen its economic sovereignty. By embracing this concept and implementing jointly administrative markets, Afghanistan can counter external influences, foster diplomatic ties, and spur economic growth. Harmonized trade policies, streamlined logistics, and efficient cross-border transactions can be achieved through these markets, leading to economic stability and sustainable development. Furthermore, the tri-borderlands provide opportunities for shared infrastructure projects in transportation networks, energy corridors, and other sectors. These projects can drive economic development, promote regional integration, and improve connectivity, ultimately benefiting Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. Collaboration in areas such as energy, agriculture, tourism, and technology exchange can enrich the economic landscape, create job opportunities, and enhance stability in the region².

The examination of the proposed tri-borderlands involving Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China reveals the immense potential for economic cooperation, regional stability, and the challenging of Western hegemonic orientations. Dr. Asim's book, coupled with the concept of jointly administrative markets, highlights the significance of forging strong partnerships, accessing diverse markets, and fostering sustainable economic growth for Afghanistan. By embracing this vision, Afghanistan can chart a path towards a peaceful and progressive future, achieving self-determination, regional integration, and prosperity for its people and the broader region.

Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan

A jointly administrative market between Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan has the potential to facilitate Afghanistan's progress and contribute to its peace and stability. By fostering economic cooperation, trade integration, and regional connectivity, such a market can address several key aspects that are essential for Afghanistan's development;

1) Economic Growth and Job Creation

The jointly administrative market would provide new opportunities for economic growth in Afghanistan. Enhanced trade ties and increased investment can stimulate economic activity, generate employment opportunities, and alleviate poverty, leading to a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan (KAYA, 2023).

¹ (Asim D. M., *The US War Economy and Offensive Realism: A Study of US Hegemony in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen*, 2023)

² *ibid*

2) Diversification of Trade and Markets

The market would enable Afghanistan to diversify its trade partners and reduce its dependence on a single market or country. By engaging with both Iran and Turkmenistan, Afghanistan can expand its export base, access new markets, and benefit from increased trade volumes, thus fostering economic resilience (KAYA, 2023).

3) Infrastructure Development

The jointly administrative market would require improved transportation and logistical infrastructure, benefiting Afghanistan's connectivity and trade capabilities. This would involve the development of roads, rail networks, and border crossings, facilitating smoother movement of goods and services and enhancing Afghanistan's regional integration (KAYA, 2023).

4) Technology and Knowledge Exchange

Collaboration within the market can lead to technology transfer and knowledge exchange. Afghanistan can leverage Iran's and Turkmenistan's expertise in various sectors to enhance its own technological capabilities, foster innovation, and promote sustainable development (KAYA, 2023).

5) Cultural and People-to-People Exchange

Increased interactions and cultural exchanges between Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkmenistan through the jointly administrative market can foster understanding, tolerance, and harmony among the nations. This can contribute to peace-building efforts, promote social cohesion, and counter the transmission of militancy or conservatism (KAYA, 2023).

Despite the potential benefits, there are several hurdles that need to be addressed when establishing this market, including Turkmenistan's fear of transmitting militancy and conservatism from Afghanistan;

- **Security Concerns**

Turkmenistan's apprehensions about security risks, particularly under Taliban rule, need to be addressed. Robust security cooperation mechanisms should be established among the participating countries to prevent the spillover of militancy, counter extremist activities, and ensure the integrity of the jointly administrative market (Nourani, 2023).

- **Trust-Building Measures**

Trust-building measures are essential to address Turkmenistan's fears and build confidence in the market. This involves engaging in open and constructive dialogue, sharing information and intelligence, and jointly developing security protocols to safeguard against security threats (KAYA, 2023).

- **Regional Cooperation**

Enhanced regional cooperation and engagement with other stakeholders, such as the European Union (EU), can provide additional reassurances to Turkmenistan. By involving the EU in discussions and initiatives related to the jointly administrative market, Turkmenistan's concerns about the transmission of militancy and conservatism can be better addressed (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

- **Social and Economic Development**

The jointly administrative market should prioritize social and economic development initiatives in Afghanistan. By focusing on poverty alleviation, education, and inclusive growth, the market can help create a more stable and progressive society, reducing the potential for extremism and conservative ideologies (Asghar, 2023).

- **International Support and Coordination**

International support and coordination, particularly from organizations like the EU, can play a vital role in addressing Turkmenistan's concerns. Cooperation in areas such as security assistance, capacity building, and economic development can strengthen the overall framework of the jointly administrative market and mitigate potential challenges (KAYA, 2023).

By effectively addressing Turkmenistan's fears and concerns through comprehensive security measures, trust-building efforts, and inclusive development strategies, a jointly administrative market between Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan can contribute to Afghanistan's progress and peace while ensuring regional stability and cooperation.

Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Creating a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan would require careful consideration and planning to ensure peace and progress, especially considering the complexities and differing ideologies present in the region. Let's analyze the various factors involved;

1) Islamic Extremist Organizations

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's presence of Islamic extremist organizations poses a challenge to ensuring peace and stability in the tri-borderland. It would be crucial to address and mitigate the influence of such organizations through coordinated efforts between the three countries. Counterterrorism measures, intelligence sharing, and cooperation in implementing strict security protocols can help minimize the threat posed by extremist groups (KAYA, 2023).

2) Turkmenistan's Liberalization and EU Relations

Turkmenistan's efforts to liberalize and seek closeness with the EU could be beneficial for fostering progressive values in the region. The EU's influence and engagement can encourage Turkmenistan to continue its liberalization agenda while maintaining security measures to counter extremist ideologies. Economic integration, trade agreements, and educational exchanges can contribute to the overall stability and progress of the tri-borderland (KAYA, 2023).

3) Uzbekistan's Stability and US Alliance

Uzbekistan's focus on countering ethno-national separatism in Karakalpakstan and aligning with the United States as a regional ally have implications for the tri-borderland. Uzbekistan's partnership with the US can enhance security cooperation and intelligence sharing, which would assist in addressing the challenges posed by extremist elements. The US presence in the region can also contribute to stability and provide a deterrent against anti-Western forces (KAYA, 2023).

4) Taliban Government in Afghanistan

The conservative and theocratic nature of the Taliban government in Afghanistan presents a potential obstacle to peaceful and progressive development in the tri-borderland. It would be important to engage in diplomatic dialogue with the Taliban, promoting understanding and cooperation while emphasizing the benefits of regional stability and economic integration. Encouraging the Taliban to adopt more inclusive and moderate policies could contribute to the overall peace and progress of the region (KAYA, 2023).

To ensure the success of a jointly administered market, the following steps could be taken;

- **Dialogue and Cooperation**
Promote open and continuous dialogue between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, with a focus on addressing security concerns, fostering economic cooperation, and promoting regional stability (Asghar, 2023).
- **Security Cooperation**
Strengthen intelligence sharing, implement joint counterterrorism measures, and collaborate on border security to counter extremist organizations and prevent the spread of violence and instability (Asghar, 2023).
- **Economic Integration**
Facilitate trade, investment, and infrastructure development to foster economic growth and cooperation. Encourage regional connectivity projects and joint ventures to enhance economic interdependence and promote stability (Asghar, 2023).
- **Cultural and Educational Exchanges**
Promote cultural understanding and tolerance through people-to-people exchanges, educational programs, and initiatives that encourage dialogue and cooperation among diverse communities (Asghar, 2023).
- **International Engagement**
Seek support from international actors, such as the EU and the United States, to provide assistance in the form of investment, technical expertise, and capacity building. Engage regional and international organizations to contribute to the peaceful and progressive development of the tri-borderland (Asghar, 2023).

While the presence of Islamic extremist organizations and differing ideologies pose challenges, a jointly administered market in the tri-borderland can contribute to peace and progress. Through effective dialogue, security cooperation, economic integration, cultural exchanges, and international engagement, the countries involved can work towards mitigating the challenges and fostering a stable and prosperous region.

Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

Creating a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan presents both opportunities and challenges for ensuring peace and progress in Pakistan, considering the socio-cultural and linguistic commonalities, as well as the ethno-national separatism experienced in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Let's examine the factors involved;

Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Commonalities

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share socio-cultural and linguistic commonalities, particularly within the context of Persian Orientalism and the Persian language. These commonalities can serve as a foundation for closer cooperation and understanding between the two countries. Emphasizing cultural exchanges, promoting educational collaborations, and facilitating people-to-people connections can foster mutual respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence (KAYA, 2023).

Ethno-National Separatism

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan both face challenges related to ethno-national separatism. Uzbekistan deals with separatist movements in Karakalpakstan, while Tajikistan confronts separatist elements in the

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, specifically with the Pamiri ethnic group. Addressing the root causes of these movements, such as socio-economic disparities, political marginalization, and cultural integration, is crucial for promoting stability and peaceful progress in the tri-borderland (KAYA, 2023).

Preventing Militancy and Religious Conservatism

Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have expressed concerns about the transmission of militancy and religious conservatism from Afghanistan, particularly under the rule of the Taliban. Collaborative efforts in intelligence sharing, border security, and counterterrorism measures can help prevent the spread of extremism and maintain regional stability. Cooperation with international partners, such as Pakistan, Russia, and regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), can further strengthen efforts in countering these challenges (KAYA, 2023).

To ensure the success of a jointly administered market, the following steps could be taken;

- **Cross-Border Cooperation and Dialogue**
Facilitate regular meetings, dialogues, and consultations among Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to address common challenges, build trust, and promote regional cooperation. Establish joint committees or working groups to address specific issues related to trade, security, and cultural exchange (Asghar, 2023).
- **Economic Integration and Development**
Encourage economic integration by removing barriers to trade, harmonizing regulations, and promoting investment in infrastructure and connectivity projects. This can foster economic growth, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region (Asghar, 2023).
- **Cultural and Educational Exchanges**
Promote cultural understanding and linguistic exchanges through academic collaborations, student exchanges, and joint research programs. These initiatives can foster a sense of shared identity, promote mutual respect, and contribute to long-term peace and stability (Asghar, 2023).
- **Addressing Ethno-National Separatism**
Engage in inclusive governance practices that address the concerns and aspirations of ethnic minority groups. Ensure equitable distribution of resources, provide opportunities for political participation, and promote cultural autonomy and preservation of minority languages and traditions. This approach can help mitigate ethno-national separatism and strengthen national unity (Asghar, 2023).
- **Regional Security Cooperation**
Strengthen regional security cooperation mechanisms, such as intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and coordinated border security measures. Enhance collaboration with international partners, including Pakistan, Russia, and the SCO, to collectively address security challenges and prevent the spread of militancy and extremism (Asghar, 2023).

Launching a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan can contribute to peaceful and progressive development in Pakistan. By promoting cross-border cooperation, economic integration, cultural exchanges, and addressing ethno-national separatism while preventing militancy and religious conservatism, the region can work towards fostering stability, prosperity, and regional harmony.

Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan

Creating a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, China, and Tajikistan can present opportunities for ensuring peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan, considering the linguistic and religious commonalities shared within the Badakhshan (Pamir) mountain range. However, it is important to address the concerns regarding Chinese misconducts and malpractices in Xinjiang, especially in relation to the treatment of local Muslims. Let's discuss the answer within the given context;

1) Linguistic and Religious Commonalities

The linguistic and religious commonalities among the Pamir people residing in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan, Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, and China's Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County can serve as a foundation for cultural understanding and cooperation. The shared Pamir languages and the adherence to the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam create a sense of community and affinity among these regions. Encouraging cultural exchanges, religious dialogues, and educational collaborations can foster mutual respect and peaceful coexistence (Nourani, 2023).

2) Socio-Cultural Associations

The socio-cultural associations facilitated through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) play a significant role in connecting the Pamir people across borders. The AKDN's initiatives in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic development have contributed to social cohesion and strengthened the bonds between these communities. Leveraging these existing associations can provide a framework for cooperation and promote peace and progress in the region (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

3) Voices of Separatism and Concerns about Xinjiang

While there may be occasional voices or aspirations for United Badakhshan, an independent Gorno-Badakhshan, or sovereign regions like Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan), it is important to note that this study did not find substantial evidence of such movements during primary visits to these areas. However, it is crucial to address the concerns raised regarding Chinese misconducts and malpractices in Xinjiang, particularly with regard to the treatment of local Muslims (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

4) Chinese Role in Regionalization

China's role in regionalization can be significant due to its economic influence, infrastructure projects, and trade opportunities. Chinese involvement in the jointly administered market can contribute to economic growth, connectivity, and stability in the tri-borderland. However, it is important for China to uphold human rights standards, ensure respect for religious and cultural freedoms, and address the concerns raised by the international community regarding the treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang (MOFA-China, 2023).

To ensure the success of a jointly administered market while addressing the concerns about Xinjiang, the following steps could be taken;

- **Dialogue and Engagement**
Promote open dialogue and engagement between Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan to discuss shared concerns, build trust, and address any grievances. Establish mechanisms for regular consultations, including multi-track diplomacy, to foster understanding and collaboration³.
- **Respect for Human Rights**
Emphasize the importance of human rights, religious freedoms, and cultural preservation in the jointly administered market. Encourage all participating countries to uphold international standards and ensure the protection of the rights of all individuals, including the Pamir people and local Muslim communities (Balkhi, 2023).
- **Economic Development and Social Integration**
Focus on inclusive economic development that benefits all communities in the tri-borderland. Prioritize projects that promote job creation, skills training, and infrastructure development, with a particular emphasis on addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting social integration (KAYA, 2023).
- **International Monitoring and Engagement**
Encourage international organizations, such as the United Nations and human rights bodies, to monitor the situation in Xinjiang and engage with China on human rights issues. Advocate for transparency, independent investigations, and dialogue between China and concerned stakeholders to address the concerns raised by the international community (KAYA, 2023).
- **Cultural Exchanges and People-to-People Connections**
Foster cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and people-to-people connections among the Pamir people in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and China's Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County. Promote initiatives that celebrate diversity, cultural understanding, and respect for each other's traditions and religious practices (Asghar, 2023).
- **Confidence-Building Measures**
Implement confidence-building measures among the participating countries, such as joint security initiatives, intelligence sharing, and border management cooperation. Enhance trust and cooperation to address common security challenges while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country (Asghar, 2023).
- **International Cooperation and Dialogue**
Engage in international cooperation and dialogue to address the concerns about Xinjiang. Encourage multilateral discussions involving regional and global stakeholders, including China, to find common ground and develop strategies that ensure the protection of human rights while promoting regional stability and development (Asghar, 2023).
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Support**
Provide humanitarian assistance to address the needs of affected communities and promote inclusive development in Xinjiang. Support programs that focus on education, vocational training, and economic opportunities, with a particular emphasis on uplifting marginalized communities and promoting social cohesion (Asghar, 2023).

Founding a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan can contribute to peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan. By leveraging linguistic and religious commonalities, promoting cultural understanding, addressing concerns about Xinjiang through

³ (Asim D. M., Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 2023)

dialogue and engagement, and ensuring respect for human rights and diversity, the tri-borderland can become a platform for regional cooperation, economic growth and enhanced stability (Feuchtwang, 2020).

Afghanistan, China and Pakistan

Establishing a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan can offer opportunities for peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan, considering the linguistic and religious commonalities present in the region. Let's examine the factors involved:

1) Linguistic and Religious Commonalities

The presence of linguistic and religious commonalities among the Pamir people in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan, Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, and various areas in Pakistan can serve as a basis for cultural understanding and cooperation. The shared Pamir languages and the adherence to the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam create a sense of community and affinity among these regions. Encouraging cultural exchanges, religious dialogues, and educational collaborations can foster mutual respect and peaceful coexistence (Feuchtwang, 2020).

2) Socio-Cultural Associations

The socio-cultural associations facilitated through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) play a significant role in connecting the Pamir people across borders. The AKDN's initiatives in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic development have contributed to social cohesion and strengthened the bonds between these communities. Leveraging these existing associations can provide a framework for cooperation and promote peace and progress in the region (Asghar, 2023).

3) Voices of Separatism

While there may be occasional voices or aspirations for united Badakhshan, an independent Gorno-Badakhshan, or sovereign regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, it is important to acknowledge that this study did not find any substantial evidence of these movements during primary visits to the areas. Nonetheless, it is crucial to address the underlying factors that may contribute to such sentiments, such as socio-economic disparities, political marginalization, and the need for cultural preservation and autonomy (Balkhi, 2023).

To ensure the success of a jointly administered market, the following steps could be taken;

- **Dialogue and Cooperation**

Facilitate regular dialogues and consultations among Afghanistan, China and Pakistan to address common challenges and build trust. Establish joint committees or working groups to focus on trade, infrastructure development and cultural exchange, providing a platform for open communication and collaboration (Asghar, 2023).

- **Economic Integration and Development**

Foster economic integration through trade facilitation, investment in infrastructure, and joint development projects. Promote cross-border trade, enhance connectivity and encourage investments that benefit all participating countries. This economic cooperation can contribute to stability, prosperity, and inclusive growth in the region (Asghar, 2023).

- **Cultural and Educational Exchanges**

Encourage cultural and educational exchanges among the Pamir communities across the tri-borderland. Facilitate academic collaborations, student exchanges, and initiatives that promote cultural understanding, language preservation, and mutual respect. This can strengthen the sense of shared identity and contribute to long-term peace and stability (Asghar, 2023).

- **Regional Security Cooperation**

Enhance regional security cooperation mechanisms, including intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and coordinated border security measures. Collaborate on counterterrorism efforts and prevent the spread of militancy, ensuring the safety and security of the tri-borderland. The involvement of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan in regional security initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), can further strengthen these efforts (Kakar, 2023) (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

- **Inclusive Governance and Development**

Promote inclusive governance practices that address the concerns and aspirations of local communities, including the Pamir people. Ensure equitable distribution of resources, political participation, and cultural autonomy. By addressing socio-economic disparities and providing opportunities for development, the grievances that may fuel separatist sentiments can be mitigated (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023) (Noor-ul-Ain, 2023).

A jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, China and Pakistan, with a focus on cultural understanding, economic integration, and regional security cooperation, can contribute to peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan. By leveraging linguistic and religious commonalities, fostering socio-cultural associations, and addressing the aspirations of local communities, the tri-borderland can become a catalyst for regional stability, economic growth, and enhanced cooperation. Through dialogue, economic integration, cultural exchanges, and inclusive governance, the jointly administered market can serve as a platform for building trust, fostering mutual understanding, and ensuring peaceful and progressive development in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Conclusion

The establishment of a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland between Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan holds significant potential for fostering peaceful and progressive development in the region. The linguistic and religious commonalities among the Pamir people provide a foundation for cultural understanding and cooperation, while the existing socio-cultural associations facilitated through the Aga Khan Development Network offer a framework for collaboration. However, it is crucial to address concerns regarding Chinese misconducts and malpractices in Xinjiang, particularly with respect to the treatment of local Muslims. By engaging in dialogue, promoting respect for human rights, encouraging economic development, and fostering international cooperation, the tri-borderland can become a catalyst for stability, inclusivity, and prosperity, benefiting the Pamir communities and the wider region. It is essential that all stakeholders work together to ensure that the jointly administered market promotes peace, respects diversity, and upholds the values of mutual understanding and respect.

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