

# The OBOR Project. Economic Initiatives around Afghanistan. Cooperation or competitions between stakeholders\*

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## SUMMARY

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## I. ABSTRACT

Two important corridors from Central and South Asia, Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) pass from two sides of Afghanistan's borders. In the north, Afghanistan received the first train from China at Hairatan on 07 September 2016; however, the train did not pass through the main route of BRI. In South Asia, we see further developments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and changing its original route to Panjab. It seems Pakistan shows its reluctance to give connections to Afghanistan. There are several other economic initiatives such as Chabahar port, Turkey, and Kazakhstan Rail Road proposal, New American Silk Road. New American Silk Road with Chabahar and Lapis lazuli corridors in Central Asia. With this understanding, there are more than three economic initiatives pass Central Asia as each of them has its own benefits for the region. However, these economic initiatives followed by different political will; concerns raised about changing these initiatives from a geo-economic mean to geo-political issue for the stakeholders. Stakeholders have not negotiated with each other; rather they have talked with states along their economic initiatives. Additionally, radicalism, terrorism, and separatism in this region have been the important source of competition. Appraisal

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of regional economic initiatives' opportunities and challenges, and looking for the ways forwarded that facilitate cooperation between stakeholders; thus, it is an important issue to discuss.

**Keywords:** BRI Initiatives, Regional Cooperation, Economic Regional Initiatives, Stakeholder Coordination.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Historic Silk Road in Asia was the most important route for trade and transit among land-locked and other states in this vast region. All regional countries were the supplement to this important road, No authority or government could ever claim a monopoly on creation and control of the Silk Road. Another reason for strength and capabilities is that, beyond specific plan of the Silk Road, it was easy to draw new ways to connect this road, which expanded the Silk Road and made it a complex. In other words, Silk Road originated from supplies and expectations emanating from various sources ranging from the mighty empires to the smallest towns and villages.

In contemporary times, for many countries located on the ancient Silk Road, particularly land-locked Central Asia, and historic Silk Road-like trade system appears to be the only alternative for their growth and development. Due to this issue, Afghanistan as a land-locked country is making many efforts to be part of all-important Silk Road and Economic Initiatives. Afghanistan in trying to link to all these initiatives is aiming to facilitate cooperation between all stakeholders to cooperate with each other including inside Afghanistan. This article will discuss the opportunities and challenges of most important regional stakeholders' initiatives around Afghanistan.

## III. ECONOMIC INITIATIVES IN A PROXIMITY OF AFGHANISTAN BORDERS

Due to needs of land-locked countries, different stakeholders with developing economic initiatives revive the ancient Silk Road. Alongside the purpose of recovering the Silk Road initiatives, China, United States, Turkey-Kazakhstan, India-Iran have designed routes in different ways. These stakeholders along their initiatives to revive the Silk Road raised two concepts of geo-economic for cooperation and geo-politics for competition. This article appraises most important initiatives strength and challenges around Afghanistan.

## **U.S. SILK ROAD**

The United States is promoting a "New Silk Road" that would link Afghanistan to Southern and Central Asia via an interconnected web of transit corridors, which could transform the regional trade environment, tearing down commercial barriers and offering economic benefits for all (Graham Lee , 2012, p.5). Beside these corridors, liberating energy from Central Asia through Afghanistan toward two sides, one Chabahar-Iran and second Pakistan-ports. These two corridors considered along U.S new American Silk road. Along with this concept, the CASA 1000, TAPI and most of the rail connection in this region considered as part of New American Silk Road. CASA-1000 project aims to transport available summer electricity surplus from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and then to Pakistan. CASA-1000 will cover almost 1200 km-route (CASA-1000 Project). CASA-1000 will also enable trade of 1300 MW of electricity between Central and South Asia, besides TAPI pipeline both are a centerpiece of the US New Silk Road initiative. World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, USAID, US Department of State, the Russian government and others, support CASA-1000. As it., these projects as a mean toward regional cooperation achieved most stakeholder of the region to support (Vladimir Fedorenko, P 27).

The Idea of New American Silk Road rose when U.S Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton in 2011 in India talked about new connections and energy liberation, or revitalization of New Silk Road. She said: "[Let's build] an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, [and] energy infrastructure, like the proposed pipeline to run from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan through Pakistan into India (TAPI). It means upgrading the facilities at border crossings. And it certainly means removing the bureaucratic barriers and other impediments to the free flow of goods and people" (U.S. Department of State, July 2011).

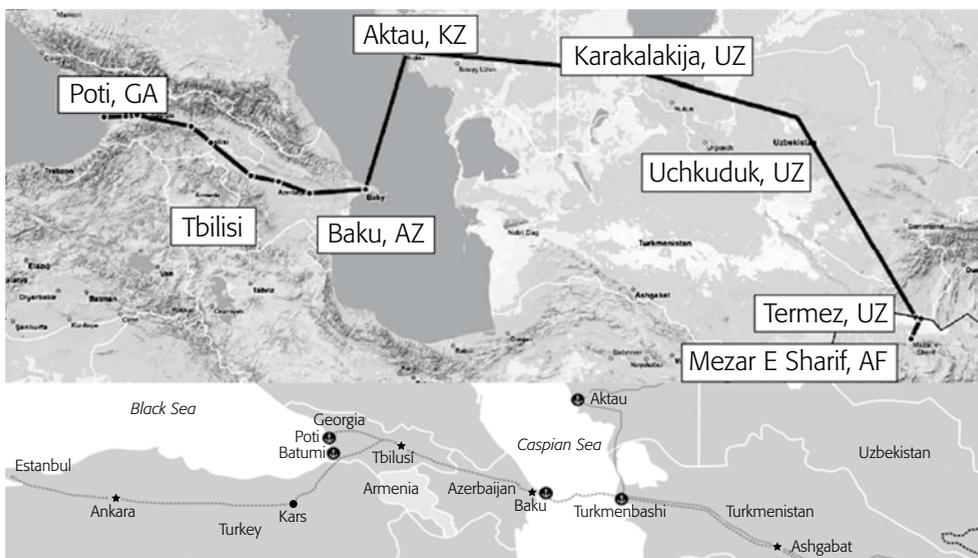
Due to New American Silk Road, anticipated to have Afghanistan embedded to the economic life of the region, so they can leave Afghanistan and this country will survive with the regional economic life. They were not calculating that we are living in the least integrated region of the world, so the idea of maintaining security with economic means and initiatives will fail in function. Thus, they had to continue its presence and at the same time guarding their establishment and orders and Afghanistan economic means. However the concept of New American Silk Road cannot be heard directly, but it is translated to Afghanistan strategy of "Silk Road through Afghanistan". Liberating energy from Central Asia, playing a regional hub and finally connecting Europe through Northern Distribution Network, which changed to Lapis Lazuli Corridor and projects like TAPI, CASA1000 and other became the most important goal of Afghanistan. Northern Distribution

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Network of U.S was a new corridor, which facilitates a new way for Afghan trade and transit. This corridor indirectly changed to Lapis Lazuli economic Transit and Transport Route- which also known as the Lapis Lazuli corridor- aims to enhance regional economic cooperation and connectivity between the countries; Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, thereby expanding economic and cultural links between Europe and Asia (RECCA Annual Review, 2016).

One of most important reason that Afghanistan translated New American Silk Road to Afghanistan economic vision was mostly due to Central Asian negative political perceptions toward U.S improvement in their countries. There was an understanding that so far the United States does not have a direct interest in this region; it has specific political or ideological order and attempting to have political change and implement democracy in the backyard of Russia. So far, Afghanistan is seeking implementation of these projects and does not care about democracy or human right in this region, this miss understanding removed.

**Map 1**  
**American Northern Distribution Network,**  
**which has changed to Lapis-Lazuli Corridor**



Since the United States faced unwillingness of Central Asian countries to cooperate with, reduced its campaigns along with New Silk Road Concept in Another field (Li Qingyan' 2015, p. 136).

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There are some reports about the lack of enough local beneficiaries for the American money and mostly the government gaining in central Asia. People of Reporter Graham Lee in his research on the NDN found that 93 percent of the money allocated to Central Asia was going directly to local governments without having any impact on the life standards of the general population. He also found that NDN did not contribute to improving regional cooperation among Central Asian states (Graham Lee, 2012). This is also can be an important reason for U.S unwillingness or unsuccessfulness in New Silk Road in this region. Consequently, Afghanistan due to its national necessity generated new initiatives to connect Afghanistan with Central Asia, Middle East, and Europe.

**Map 2**  
**Economic Initiatives in and on Afghanistan. Source Regional Economic Cooperation, MoFA, Afghanistan**



### **TURKEY SILK ROAD**

Turkey was the first nation to recognize the independence of the Central Asian republics and today has a significant political and social presence in Central Asia. Turkey has shown its presence independent of any strategic or cyclical political

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interest. Turkey due to the concept of Silk Road and its geographical condition before Hilary Clinton; was negotiating reviving the old silk road. Thus, Turkey through an International Forum on the Role of Customs Administration on Facilitating and Promoting Trade among Silk Road Countries, started its diplomacy on new Silk Road Initiatives at 2008 in Antalya. This forum focused on the simplification of border crossing procedures among Silk Road countries.

Customs and Trade Minister Hayati Yazıcı in an interview with Today's Zaman gave detailed information about the rate of trade in Europe gave an alternative and put emphases on the Silk Road path. Mr. Yazice, additionally predicted that countries on the Silk Road path are on the way of a transformation, the Silk Road will become one of the main economic routes of the world economy, moving large amounts of goods and products from Central Asia to Europe or vice versa. "This transformation consists of efforts to revive the Silk Road via extensive railway networks, transportation lines, customs gates, energy corridors and natural gas pipelines, making this area a major player in the world economy," he said, detailing Turkey's vision for the road. Countries located on the historic Silk Road route generally listed as China, Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, Tajikistan, South Korea, Afghanistan, Georgia, and Turkey. Other adjacent routes also existed for the Silk Road initiatives that help countries to mix their initiatives and facilitate cooperation (Cihan Today's Zaman).

The next forum held in Baku, Azerbaijan, at 2009, produced the Caravanserai project – which the concept originated from old Silk Road a place for the resting of caravan and exchange idea - this project focused on increasing the efficiency of the Silk Road routes and particularly the border crossing points (BCP). Caravanserais were supporting the flow of commerce and information along the Silk Road. In 2010 in Tehran Silk Road Truck Caravan launched through Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). In 2011 in Georgia, "Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA)<sup>1</sup> appreciated for its support of the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat as the administrative body in charge of the implementation and follow-up of the decisions for the Forum. The forum called its members to consider the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) proposed by TRACECA and

<sup>1</sup> This initiative is the main Europe' to connect this region TRACECA, an international transport initiative involving the European Union and 14 member states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). TRACECA aims to promote regional economy by providing reliable and efficient transport links between Europe and Asia. More information is in Welcome to TRACECA", available at <http://www.tracecaorg.org/en/traceca/>

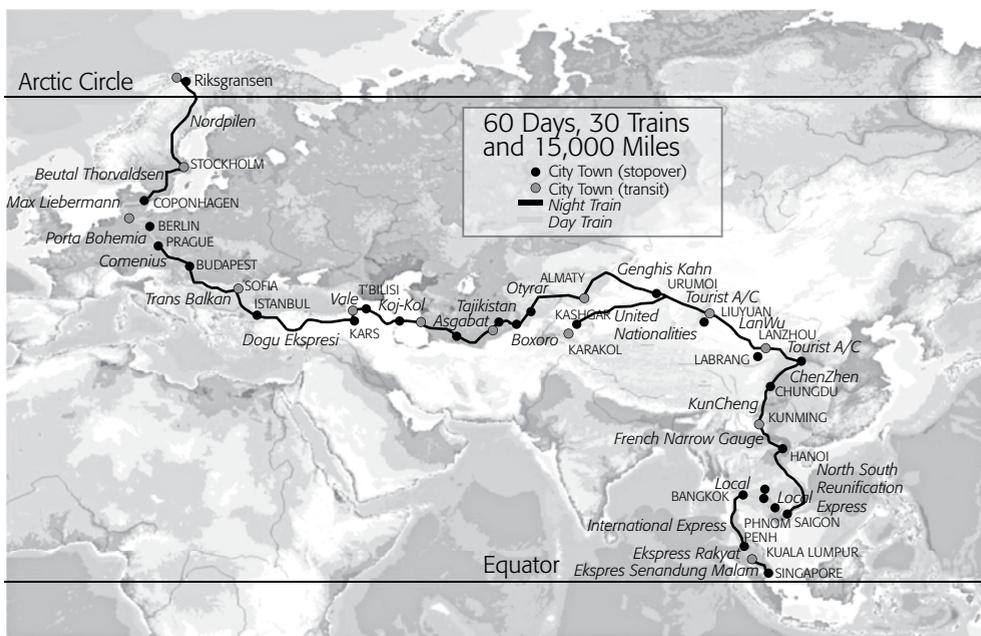
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Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey signed the MOU with TRACECA (Vladimir Fedorenko, p. 11-12). Through this perspective, Turkey facilitates a connection between states along its initiatives with TRACECA.

Along this forum, the fifth Forum held on 29-30 November 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey. During this Forum, representatives from Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey have signed the Joint Statement on the ECO Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Transport Corridor. The sixth International Silk Road Forum held on 14-15 November 2013 in Qebele, Azerbaijan. Finally, the seventh International Silk Road Forum held on 23-24 November 2016 in Aktau, Kazakhstan (Ministry of Customs and Trade, Republic of Turkey, 2015). Forums five and six were mostly has emphasized on coordination regarding the previous mechanism, while in forum seven, states were emphasizing connections with Chinese Belt and Road Initiatives.

There is another Turkey's railroad proposal through Almaty-Aktau port in Kazakhstan passing over the Caspian Sea- Baku-Tbilisi-Kars-Edirne (Turkey). This proposal brought Kazakhstan as one of the main route, which made it much important.

### Map 3 Turkey proposal of Railroad



the connection between both aims of economic initiatives. Having Kazakhstan as the most advanced economy in Central Asia, oil-rich Kazakhstan leads the region

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in terms of GDP and purchasing power, while also acting as a key business and logistic hub linking China and Europe, facilitate two important results; one gaining success, the other having china in the initiative (HKTDC Research). Kazakhstan is a country that president Xi Jinping had started to talk about Belt and road Initiatives. This country can facilitate good connections between China and Turkey perception of Silk Road and cooperation due to this subject.

The purpose of Turkey initiative was to revitalize ancient Silk Road, turn it into a preferable route and to increase the trade and transportation volume between Europe and China and among the countries on this route through harmonization, facilitation, and acceleration of border crossing procedures among Silk Road Countries. Along with this purpose, Turkey has facilitated collaboration not just with the states along economic, rather with stakeholder. Turkey has made huge collaboration with China to build a roughly 7,000 km rail network; including high-speed train projects in Turkey with the participation of Chinese companies (estimated the construction complete by 2023). Turkey made many efforts to provide reliable and efficient transport links between Europe and Asia due to the Asian and European mechanism (TRACECA). These efforts made Turkey New Silk Road more successful and transparent than American, however, the American one has been more translated to Afghan economic Strategy. Thus, one of most important significant of Turkey efforts is connecting its initiatives with other initiatives while American was not able to do it. Despite all these advantages for turkey's initiative, there should be a consideration on disadvantages and challenges of this project.

While Central and West of Asia is considered as one of the least integrated regions in the world with full of border disputes, sovereignty challenges, extremism, and separatism; Turkey economic initiatives cannot be without challenges. The most important challenges in front of Turkey's initiatives is the lack of capital to build its initiative to have all Eurasia and south Asia. In other words, no state in this region can invest all required capital; there is needed cooperative strategy among these region countries. Turkey tried to facilitate communication between states and stakeholders to invest, but it seems states concerns, made them reluctant in this regard. The most important initiative in this region is china initiatives of Belt and Road Initiatives.

### ***CHINA ONE BELT ONE ROAD OR BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVES***

Due to having a glance at the history of China foreign policy during the communist party, China's foreign policy has moved from risk-averse caution to optimistic 'dreaming' about a better world in which China will have recovered its place. Whereas 20 years ago China used to keep saying 'no', or at best 'maybe', to the international community, now it wants to say 'yes', though without simply

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acquiescing in western hegemony (Pang Zhongying, 2015, p.1-13). China now suggests the biggest initiatives to world trade and transit and convincing the states to join and collaborate with the Belt and Road Initiatives. From another aspect Since China productions extensively increased, there was a question rising about demand shortages in the internal and international market that can negatively affect China productions. In 2009, former deputy director of China's State Administration of Taxation Xu Shanda submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Commerce titled the Chinese Marshall Plan that can create demand and more contracts for Chinese enterprises in the major projects of infrastructure and construction. Such projects would pave the ways for Chinese goods and services to enter new markets. This vision has been largely born due to Belt and Road Initiatives under President Xi Jinping administration since 2013 in Central Asia (Jiayi Zhou, Karl Hallding, and Guoyi Han, p. 13-14).

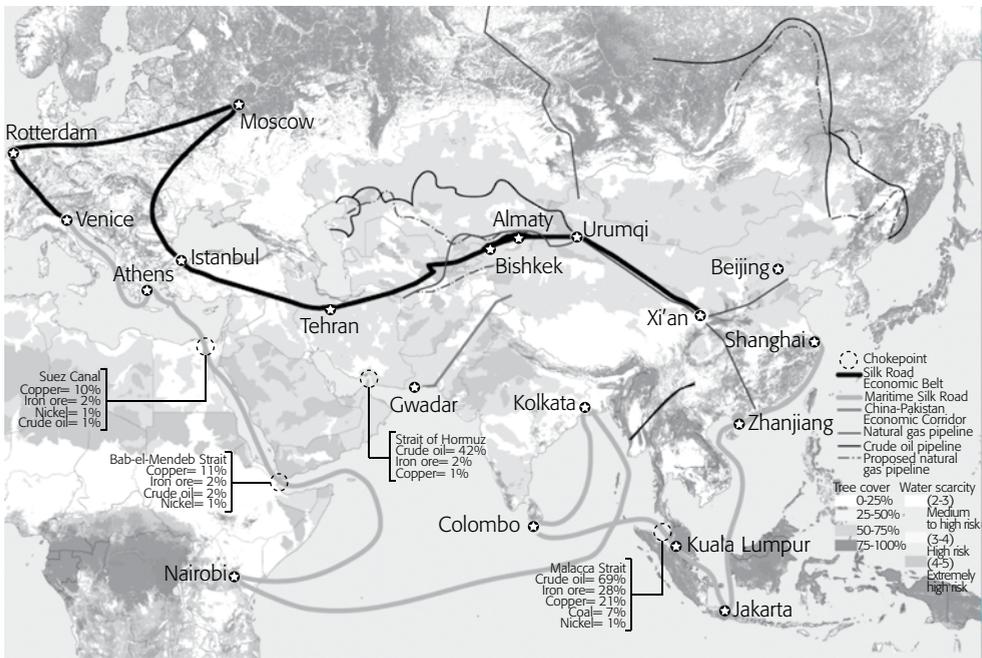
President Xi Jinping officially has proposed one Belt One Road (OBOR) that changed to Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) as Chinese initiative on September of 2013 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Silk Road Economic Belt and road seeks to expand closer economic ties and cooperation between regional and beyond countries. These initiatives potentially involving an area that covers 55 percent of world GNP, 70 percent of global population, and 75 percent of known energy reserves. Consisting of six ways: 1. New Eurasian Land Bridge 2. China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor 3. China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor 4. China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor 5. China-Pakistan Corridor 6. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar. China has proposed and established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) for the support and setting up of Silk Road Foundation. So far, the core perspective of this Article is near economic Initiative of Afghanistan, so the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) in Central Asian and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); overall, these initiatives are following the blow elements of strategy.

- *Strengthening policy communication*; which means negotiating to solve cooperation-related issues; providing policy support for the implementation of practical cooperation and projects.
- *Improving road connectivity*; which means transportation infrastructure construction; energy infrastructure construction; constructing of cross-border optical cables and other communications trunk line networks
- *Promoting trade facilitation*; which can be translated to enhancing customs cooperation; expanding trading areas, improving trade structure; speeding up investment facilitation; expanding mutual investment areas.
- *Enhancing monetary circulation*; that illustrated to make more efforts in building currency stability, investment and financing and credit information systems in Asia and strengthening financial regulation cooperation.

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- *Strengthening people-to-people exchange.* Which can be translated to sending more students to each other's countries, and promoting cooperation in jointly running schools; enhancing cooperation in and expand the scale of tourism; increasing cooperation in science and technology and increasing exchanges and cooperation between nongovernmental organizations

Map 4  
 China Belt and Road Initiatives



Through this program, China has been pursuing the great interest in developing multilateral partnerships with Central Asian countries in many areas, including energy, trade and transportation routes. One of the most important energy deals between Central Asia and China is the 1100-mile gas pipeline that transports Turkmen gas to China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. "The Central Asia-China gas pipeline began operating in 2009 and aimed to reach its full annual capacity of 40 billion cubic meters of gas by this year. Another important energy project is the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline, which it is the China's first direct import pipeline, pumping 14 million tons of oil per year. In addition, China has provided Central Asian countries with generous loans. For example, in 2009, it provided about \$4 billion to Turkmenistan to develop its Yolotan-South Osman gas field. China also

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provided \$10 billion in loans to Kazakhstan in 2009, including a \$5 billion loan to KazMunaiGas, Kazakhstan's national oil and Gas Company. Jeffrey Woodruff, a senior director at Fitch Ratings, says that China's lending politics would reduce Central Asia's debt to Russian companies: "China wants the energy supplies, has a huge capital base to help and may be able to offer better rates than western lenders for some time going forward" ( Jiayi Zhou, Karl Hallding, and Guoyi Han, p. 13-14). Along This project, Belt and Road Initiatives in this region made two important scenarios to rise up, one pessimistic, and the other optimistic. Through pessimistic approach, China is getting more expansion, dominance, and chance of extraction that consequently help her to rise non-peacefully. Through optimistic approach about BRI, China facilitates mutual understanding, learning, cooperation, dialogue, development and more integration among regional and beyond regional countries.

Spillover effects have created threats to the security and stability of China's western regions. The terrorist force of the East Islamist Movement (ETIM) resides in Afghanistan and Pakistan and acts in collusion with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, to train terrorists who stage attacks in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and other provinces (Li Qingyan, p.138).

As a neighboring country sharing a border with China, the peace and stability of Afghanistan have great significance to China safeguarding the stability of its western regions and fighting the "three forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism, containing the harm of drugs, and promoting the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt. China and the United States can proceed with promoting the interconnection, intercommunication and the energy development of Afghanistan and look for areas to integrate with their respective belt and Road initiatives plans and explore local projects that meet the common interests of the three sides in light of the needs for the national development of Afghanistan( Li Qingyan, p.13) .On building interconnectivity through infrastructure and telecommunications and measures for regional economic integration, China, United States and Afghanistan have similar priorities in launching power, oil, and gas projects connecting Afghanistan with surrounding countries, the engineering projects of cross-border highways and railways, on which the three countries can discuss feasible ways and measures for cooperating (Li Qingyan, p. 143) .

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of China economic Corridors which passing not far from our eastern borders. This economic corridor main aim is to promote bilateral connectivity, construction, explore potential bilateral investment, economic and trade, logistics and people to people contact for regional connectivity. This project includes the following aspects:

"Integrated Transport & IT systems including Road, Rail, Port, Air and Data Communication Channels; Energy cooperation; Spatial layout, functional zones, indus-

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tries and industrial parks; Agricultural development & poverty alleviation; Tourism cooperation & people to people communication; Cooperation in livelihood areas; Human Resource Development” (CPEC Vision & Mission, CPEC official website, 2017).

Since 2013 China Belt and Road Initiatives is the most important initiatives with the huge amount of capital behind. Belt and Road Initiatives considered as an important game changer for the region that can facilitate cooperation among states in this region. However, there is a strong diplomacy among states along their initiatives and little coordination made between stakeholders, but these initiatives are still the most important agenda for regional cooperation and integration.

### ***RUSSIAN PERCEPTION OF NEW SILK ROAD IN CENTRAL ASIA***

However, we have been discussing different Silk Road Initiatives from major regional and beyond regional stakeholders in Yi Asia, but there is no any New Silk Road initiative from Russia Federation in this region. During the Soviet period, Central Asia along other region received huge investments in the different area. Russian Federation as the inheritor of Soviet Union is not going to have more investment rather it wants to have them all safe and linked to Moscow. While there is, an economic project named the Eurasian Economic Union – the economic and political alliance among the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan and “it has been promoting its own plans for the Eurasian Economic Union” (CPEC Vision & Mission, CPEC official website, p. 7). Most recently, step in this project is the establishment of the Customs Union signed by three members – Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Kyrgyzstan considered joining to this project in 2015.

Russian Federation due to the policy of saving Russian speakers and ethnic Russians abroad still is for its dominance and causes concern for Central Asians. Central Asian countries; Kazakhstan has 4 million, Uzbekistan has 620,000, Kyrgyzstan has 500,000, Tajikistan has 137,000 and Turkmenistan has 142,000 ethnic Russians in their countries (Robert Greenall, 2017). The Ukraine crisis has undermined Russia’s legitimacy by raising suspicions for both Central Asia and China about Russian intentions in the region. The prevention of color revolutions, which, in the recently updated version of Russia’s’ Military Doctrine, has potential implications across the former Soviet space (Raffaele Pantucci & Sarah Lain, 2016). Russia along its strategy in Central Asia is increasing its military involvement in central Asia. In addition, Russia through different deals with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan intended to extend its bases until 2042 and 2032 respectively. It has announced an increase of troops in Tajikistan in its largest foreign base, from 5,900 to 9,000 soldiers by 2020. Russia is planning to renew the fleet of its

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airbase at Kant, Kyrgyzstan by 2016. It has already sent a dozen of new and modified versions of Su-25 fighter jets to replace older planes (Abdujalil Abdurasulov, 2015). While Russia cannot have the more economic investment in Central Asian countries, she seems not to be reluctant with other economic initiatives, especially Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in this region.

Through a Russian geopolitical perspective in Central Asia, Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in cooperation with the Eurasian Union can be a good project, while it is under sanctions by the United States and many European states. China is happy to be the largest investment partner to the region but does not wish to own the political and security problems of Central Asia in the same way Russia prepared to do. Therefore, in the security sphere, Russia still is the dominant player (Raffaele Pantucci & Sarah Lain, 2016). It seems Russia and China indirectly divided their duties; Russia is securing and China is investing. However, Russians cannot ignore the benefits, which are existed in central Asian convergent economic initiatives. Various Russian experts argued that the intersection of Russia's own economic project, the Eurasian Economic Union, and China's BRI "creates the necessary conditions for the interpenetration and integration of the EEU projects and the Silk Road Economic Belt." From an economic point of view, there is no contradiction between these two formats –on the contrary, they complement each other". Economic initiatives coordination and cooperation is a project that is still under negotiation. It seems to be an important part of both countries is trying to boost their economic ties (Valdai Discussion Club Analytical report). Russia is the third largest shareholder in Asian infrastructure investment Bank (AIIB) as an important fund for the BRI and at the same time, two countries have the mechanism such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization CSTO, over the concept of regional cooperation.

Russia and United States in Trump period seems to have different relation than Obama China-Pakistan. Trump seems to have Russia in his concentration to seek two important goals; first, reduce her commitment toward terrorism, second making an alternative for china, which make also pressure on China.

### **INDIA-IRAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR**

Populated stakeholders along their necessities are seeking new corridors and routes. India as second most populated and important state in South Asia is increasing cooperation and trade with Iran in West Asia to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia. Iran for changing Chabahar to an important hub for international trade and transit is facilitating such route.

India is investing \$500 million in order to develop Chabahar port. The port would open a transit route to Afghanistan and Central Asia for Indian goods and

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products. Chabahar port would also enhance Indian oil and gas import opportunities that would also help tackle Indian energy shortage crisis. This port would also create new economic opportunities for India in Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East Indian (Jawad Falak, Zeeshan Muneer and Hassan Riaz Chabahar, 2016, p.3) companies will have opportunities to venture into Afghanistan and explore its enormous mineral wealth. In the long term, it will act as a hub for Indian trading operations to venture into the oil and mineral-rich Central Asia (Capt.HPS Sodhi , 2015).

The proposed Iran-Afghanistan road network: Chabahar-Milak-Zaranj-Dilaram, a project that constructed by India in 2009, for transport and trade to and through Afghanistan's Garland Highway. India has already spent UDS100 million on building the 220-kilometre road in the Nimroz province of Afghanistan (Capt.HPS Sodhi , 2015). India is finalizing a plan of 900-km railway construction from Chabahar port to the rich mineral with a potential value of 420.9 billion in Bamian. This link also has availability to connect with five-nation railways especially Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

**Map 5**  
**Chabahar Port and Corridor**



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Chabahar port is an opportunity for the cooperation between U.S with Iran-India, while this helps to meet and facilitate new American Silk Road. Since Chabahar Port and routes to Central Asia through Afghanistan are to liberate energy from Central Asia, U.S considering it as a common interest and along with New American Silk Road in Central Asia. Additionally while India as one of the important American ally in Afghanistan is investing, this project translated for the purpose of Integrating Afghanistan with regional economic means, to reduce tension or threat of terrorism.

Since 2001 Afghanistan has been an important stage between regional states with the United States to negotiate and increase their mutual interests and understandings. International Sanctions, strongly affected Iranian economy, they can use this opportunity to reduce the sanctions. The opportunity of foreign investment to Chabahar port and its route through Afghanistan; was given to Iran as the incentive during nuclear agreement by the United States. It is also mentioned that, however, if Tehran delivers on the nuclear agreement substantially— if not completely; India could continue its engagement. Indian presence also can ensure long-term U.S. interests (that converge with Indian interests) guaranteed due to this project (Center on cooperation International, Feb, 2016, p. 34). While Trump tweets and possibly foreign policy toward Iran is limiting sphere and dominance on her peripheries' countries; combating terrorism through economic means with the axle of Chabahar may pivot cooperation rather completion.

Each of the new Silk Road initiatives described above has its own specific agenda, goals, and priorities to revive Silk Road. Whereas all these initiatives generally support and complement each other. For example, there has been active cooperation between Turkey and China over their respective visions of new Silk Road initiatives. Historically, the Silk Road was the most important route connecting the Ottoman and Chinese Empires. In an effort to revive the vitality of the ancient Silk Road trade scheme, in the last two decades, China has been actively cooperating with Turkey in many areas. Growing volume of trade relationships between Turkey and China will certainly require the use of transportation routes, logistic services and customs regulations through Central Asian states. With the help of Turkish partners, China has been improving its motorway connections in the North West as well as expanding its air facilities in Urumqi. Another important route is the Western Route that is currently under construction but will link northwestern China and Europe via Turkey, passing through a number of corridors including Iran and Kazakhstan (Vladimir Fedorenko, p. 33). However, China Turkey bilateral economic cooperation reached to stakeholders stage, but still their multi-lateral cooperation due to economic initiatives proposals are not well discussed.

Under the circumstance of US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, United States tried to integrate Afghanistan with regional economic initiatives, but it was

not successful. Thus, U.S withdrawal did not happen completely. While China need stable region and U.S want Afghanistan to be integrated with regional economic routes to maintain security, it seems there is a common goal between U.S and China, and Afghanistan can be a good Stage to cooperate. Looking back to history, China and the United States had joined hands to set up cooperative training projects and assistance to Afghanistan, such as the Sino-US project of training Afghan diplomats initiated in 2012 and 2016. There are also new cooperative projects training for Afghan, such as medical personnel and agricultural technicians to commence. Cooperation on Confidence Building Measures (CBM) is an important component of the Istanbul Process can constitute a major platform for regional interstate cooperation.<sup>2</sup> These are some example which china and U.S had cooperated, which means they can improve their relations it in another field such as military training and facilitating military equipment cooperatively and finally cooperation in reviving belt and road initiatives in Central Asia.

#### IV. RISK ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

By looking horizontally to all economic initiative in Central Asia, it is easy to understand that Chinese Belt and Road Initiatives is the most important one in this region. BRI as the most important game changer in this region covering the strategic area in Asia and Eurasia, through chines geographical perspective. Since the initiative is a Chinese oriented project, it is not covering all regional necessities and at the same time, there is no enough cooperation among regional actors to fulfill this initiative. Those regional stakeholders, who cannot see their enough interest in BRI, seek their own strategies. Some of these strategies overlapping each other's and some others have a different route. Through a regional and horizontal perspective, states initiatives, which illustrated in this article, facing challenges and risks. "Harsh terrain, long distances to the market, high costs, slow customs, corruptions, political instability, and terrorism," (Irina Ionela Pop, 2016, p. 9), with the following elements are considered as most important challenges in this region.

1. This vision, or an iteration of it, has largely been borne out under the Xi Jinping administration, which, these investments; loans, and grants dispersed to create a network of infrastructure —including roads and rail lines, energy pipelines, power stations, and coastal ports— envisioned to extend west to Europe via

<sup>2</sup> The 2014 conference of Istanbul Process decided on 64 priority projects in six major domains including antiterrorism, drug control, disaster management, business and commercial investment opportunities, local infrastructure building, and education.

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- the Silk Road Economic Belt, and downwards into Southeast Asia via the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Miao Lu, 2016)
2. Several potential risks exist in the One Belt, One Road Central Asian countries. Conflicts exist between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. For example, Uzbekistan strongly opposes China's hydropower project in, as the proposed dam is located upstream on the Amu Darya River in Tajikistan. This investment could therefore adversely affect Uzbekistan's access to water, a scarce resource in Central Asia (Miao Lu, 2016).
  3. Belt and Road Initiatives is mostly looked as a mean to mitigate security challenges in Xinjiang and China periphery. Most Radical groups with the exception of TIP, IMU and their related groups; defectively grantee Chinese economic initiatives in the region. While this is not enough, when we remind the U.S military withdrawal from Afghanistan, which mostly considered as a vacuum of power, China need to rethink about the safety of its capital (Christopher K. Johnson, 2016, p.23). China invested in Kazakhstan about \$22 billion investment during 1991-2013. At end of 2014, China's total stock of FDI to Kazakhstan exceeded \$7.5 billion. Moreover, new packages of economic deals totaling \$14 billion and \$23 billion were unveiled in December 2014 and in March 2015 respectively. Therefore, it is quite important for Beijing to minimize political risks and protect her overseas direct investment having governments' guarantee that they will not change the outcome of previously signed agreements (Lidiya Parkhomchik, 2016). In guaranteeing these investments, china needs to have more involvement in political and security affairs, for stability.
  4. Due to United States partnership with Trans-Pacific as a 'pivot towards Asia' and continuing resistances between Washington and Beijing over the maritime territorial claims, anticipation shows there is no a real potential turning point vanishing this soon in this region. China's "periphery diplomacy" has three essential elements: criticism of the US system of alliances, promotion of cooperation with its neighbors in areas such as counter-terrorism and economic cooperation, and trying to form new international frameworks where China can play a central role (Irina Ionela Pop, 2016, p. 7). Through U.S perspective, the context of BRI initiative is strategically significant for two reasons for China. First, it validates a Chinese concern to compete with the United States as much as possible with strategic economic policies or through military ones. Second, it distracts some Chinese attention away from the Pacific and towards the west. In this perspective, it is somewhat premature for china to claim entered into the Eurasian era. Clearly, this is also to some level it is an oversimplification since it does not include consideration of the impact of the Maritime Silk Road (Peter Ferdinand, 2016, pp. 953-954) U.S perception toward Chinese BRI is different, with China has given to the region. It is an important obstacle which

China need to solve due to creating more coordination with U.S and States which holding U.S bases.

5. China-Pakistan Economic corridor is passing from Kashmir disputed territory, any dispute between India and Pakistan stop all the corridors' activities. One of the ways may solve this issue is giving a connection to India to reach Central Asia through Afghanistan or China, which is also difficult to accept by India and even china. Additionally, since Pakistan has changed the route of the corridor to Panjab, the conflict between people of the cities was holding the original CPEC with the Panjab people has risen up. Protestors changed the term of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to China Panjab Economic Corridor (Adnan Amir, 2015). Also changing the route of CPEC increased the distance between Afghanistan territory and CPEC. Additionally, CPEC is owned and managed by Pakistani military establishment and they expect to receive weapons in return, this also increases civilian and military disputes.

**Map 6**  
**China-Pakistan Economic Corridor original and new proposed route**



6. Domestic Restructuring in the countries along the Belt and Road Initiatives is a costly project. Without considering South and Central Asia, there is about \$800 billion annual shortfall for infrastructure needs in Asia-Pacific countries which they much had better condition than the other routes (Jiayi Zhou, Karl Hal-

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lding, and Guoyi Han ,2015) .These huge investments in the fluctuating and somehow vulnerable societies may not return the benefit of investment, all the time. Secondly, so far, upwards of 90 percent of China's foreign investment has been done through state channels and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), consequently, the financial investment returns have been low. For instance, the head of China's mining association in 2013 estimated up to 80 percent of China's mining ventures overseas had failed (Jiayi Zhou, Karl Hallding, and Guoyi Han, 2015) . This perspective exists among Central Asian countries, which they are reluctant to give more authorities to none governmental companies. The practicality of some initiatives and projects criticized because of political leadership due to not being overly enthusiastic in liberalizing their trade, empowering private sector or opening their economies. However, staying aloof and failing to seize opportunities presented by such initiatives will eventually jeopardize the status quo (Vladimir Fedorenko, p. 35).

Focusing mostly on Chinese Belt and Road Initiatives' challenges, was due to its importance in this region. This literally does not mean other initiatives do not face challenges. Along with obstacles regarding BRI, all other regional economic initiatives face somehow similar or more important challenges. Chines BRI consuming more capital, while other initiatives such as Turkey and Kazakhstan economic initiatives do not have this much capital. U.S New Silk Road banned due to Central Asian mistrust about U.S political will in this region. All economic initiatives in this region facing challenges, which originated from the substantial condition or the states, are reluctant to implement the initiatives well.

## V. CONCLUSION

Each of the new Silk Road initiatives described in this article has its own specific agenda, goals, and priorities. However, all of them contribute, much like the ancient Silk Road, to a system of trade and cooperation that is reemerging in Central Asia, but none of them can handle completely ancient Silk Road. Various new Silk Road initiatives generally have the capability to support and complement each other. For example, there has been active cooperation between Turkey and China over their respective visions of new Silk Road initiatives. Historically, the Silk Road was the most important route connecting the Ottoman and Chinese Empires. Along with this cooperation, one more area is Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a chance for China and the United States to discover their pragmatic cooperation. If both sides can efficiently control their differences and join hands on the issue of promoting peaceful reconstruction in Afghanistan, it will

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have a significant positive effect not only on peace and on prosperity in the region, but also on the development of the Sino-US relationship.

China Town Hall in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the national committee of U.S. China relations invited Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, as one of most important analyst about China and U.S relation. Kissinger during this interview answered many different questions about U.S-China relation. To a question that "what are U.S. China untapped source of cooperation?" He mentioned cooperation on Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and Afghanistan as the immediate country of china are two important chance for cooperation between both countries. In this article, it was well illustrated that central Asia and Afghanistan can be a unique stage for cooperation between two countries counter-terrorism stakeholders.

There are some political resistances between the United States' New Silk Road strategy and the Russian vision of regional integration in Central Asia. The United States views the Russian-led Customs Union as an attempt to 'resovietize' former soviet states. This resistance during Hillary Clinton and her agenda to slow down or prevent EEU became tenser. At the same time, there are opportunities in cooperation between both states. Through New Silk Road, projects there are projects such as CASA-1000, which Russia has invested. Since Trump took the power, anticipation for the low level of resistance and possible cooperation against combating terrorism raised up. Along with this goal, Afghanistan can be a good stage for combating terrorism and increasing cooperation between these two important stakeholders.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- China needs to improve its relations with the great powers, promoting its national interest in an internationally accepted way and focusing on cooperation.
- There should be a new chapter for the negotiating of stakeholder to talk about their regional and economic initiatives. This negotiating will not just help to have positive consequences on economic affairs; rather there will be more cooperation in security affairs.
- Facilitating connecting Chabahar through Afghanistan, with New American Silk Road. The belief or concept of economic initiatives to maintain the security stability in the region raised up. Therefore, it should change to operative strategies.
- There is a competition between China and India about routes to Central Asia, which has forced India to take U.S side. If China convinces India to accept a link connection through Kashmir territory to CPEC and then Afghanistan, this will have numerous results. First, India will grantees the security of CPEC in Kashmir dispute; second, Kashmir disputes will reduce; third, India doesn't

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invest massively in Chabahar while it is costly; four, CPEC benefits increase and changes to the most important route in South Asia.

- Afghanistan is not just a multilateral stage of diplomacy; rather it is a stage of the operative and practical field of cooperation with other stakeholders economically. Afghanistan should create a new diplomacy for practical economic cooperation between stakeholders.

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