

Development of Infrastructural Linkages between Pakistan and Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is located at the confluence of three vital regions of South, Central and West Asia and provides the shortest access to the sea for all landlocked countries of Central Asia besides Western China. Strategic communication and trade linkages among these three regions passing through Pakistan will transform the country into an economic hub giving boost to inter-regional economic activity. Baluchistan sits on estimated reserves of 29 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 6 billion barrels of oil. The Gwader complex will provide a port, warehouses, and industrial facilities for more than twenty countries. The port will eventually be able to receive oil tankers with a capacity of 200,000 tons. The construction of Gwadar port and related connecting routes with Afghanistan actually reduce these distances by approximately 500 km for Pakistan-Central Asia traffic. Pakistan and China are up-grading the Karakoram Highway (KKH). The two countries have agreed to open four new road links through the Khunjerab Pass, bringing the total number of China-Pakistan roads links to eight. Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to initiate a bus service that would not only enhance trade but also be an important tool to promote people-to-people contacts between the four countries. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline projects are important to meet the growing energy needs of Pakistan and India. Although Central Asia is landlocked, the tremendous untapped hydrocarbon wealth of the Caspian Sea region makes it the world's envy. Pakistan offers the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and inter-regionally. Pakistan's membership and association of the regional organizations namely SCO, SAARC and ECO lends the country a unique position to facilitate inter-regional cooperation. Pakistan's participation in these projects will symbolize the return of the Indus valley to the central place in region-wide economic and cultural interaction.

KEY WORDS: Pakistan, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Communication linkages, People to people contact, Pipeline, KKH.

Introduction

Pakistan is located at the confluence of three vital regions of South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia and provides the shortest access to the sea for all landlocked countries of Central Asia besides Western China. Pakistan is also fast emerging as the junction for multiple corridors of cooperation between all three regions involving energy, trade, transportation and tourism. Strategic communication and trade linkages between South, Central and West Asia passing through Pakistan will transform the country into an economic hub giving boost to inter-regional economic activity. Pakistan and Central Asia are centers of world's earliest civilizations. Pakistan's cultural contacts with central Asia can be traced back to the Prehistoric times. The existence of links between Pakistan and Central Asia at the end of 3rd and the beginning of 2nd millennium B.C is beyond doubts. Most of the Central Asian governments now acknowledge Pakistan's importance as a southern transit route, providing an outlet for their landlocked economies. Pakistan has an edge over other transit routes because it offers three major seaports along the Arabian Sea, i.e., Karachi port, Qasim Port and Gwadar port. Strategic communication and trade linkages among these three regions passing through Pakistan will transform the country into an economic hub giving boost to inter-regional economic activity. Pakistan's Baluchistan province is very rich in natural resources particularly hydrocarbons. It sits on estimated reserves of 29 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 6 billion barrels of oil. When Central Asian states got independence from Russia, in 1991, Pakistan strove to establish political and economic links between them but the cultural relations were not revived. Central Asian Republics soon realized the importance of establishing economic, cultural, political and diplomatic ties with Pakistan. Pakistan increased its linkage with Central Asian States when the later signed the charter of the ECO on November 28, 1992. Still there is hardly any movement of people between Pakistan and Central Asian States. The flow of cultural information through electronic or print media is also poor. In this age of globalization concrete steps like roads, railway tracks, and pipelines are required to integrate the Central and South Asian Regions. In this connection Pakistan is located at the crossroads and can play important role in this constructive regional integration for peace and development.

Pakistan-Central Asia Linkages

The old relationship shared by the people of two regions can only be revived through some convenient communication network, which is affordable and accessible to the people belonging to all walks of life (Haq & Khawaja, 2011). New energy, transportation and trade links between the countries of Central and South Asia can help bring prosperity and long-term stability to the region and

restore it as a cultural and commercial crossroads. Economic stability and independence come from having multiple outlets to the world -- multiple sets of pipelines, multiple transport corridors, and multiple trading partners. The landlocked countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan are all dependent on their neighbors and would benefit greatly from increasing their connections to each other. It is high time to look for more reliable supplies of electricity from power-surplus countries in Central Asia to power-deficit countries in South Asia, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Several steps have already been taken. To help improve transportation in the region, a \$36 million U.S.-funded bridge opened in 2007 over the Pyanj River between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The U.S. Agency for International Development is providing \$3.5 million in new targeted technical assistance to help establish a transparent and competitive Central Asian energy market (Boucher, 2011).

Pakistan's location allows it to provide convenient and modern rail and roadways with relatively short distances (Kazi, n.d.: 88). By early 2006, the Afghan-Pak trade has already reached US\$1.2 billion as contrasted to the \$3 million trade between India and Pakistan. Pakistan shares a border of approximately 2500 km with Afghanistan and offers it key trade facilities. Trade volume between Afghanistan and Pakistan has continued to rise. Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed to construct jointly a key 20 km-long road through Wakhan border to facilitate trilateral trade; parallel to the road will be an electricity transmission line that will allow Pakistan to import electricity from Tajikistan, with the further possibility of exporting it to India. Pakistan's initiatives over the past several years have improved its relations with the Central Asian States. Pakistan and Uzbekistan signed an extradition treaty in January 2002, and the Pakistani government waived a \$10 million loan to Kyrgyzstan. The Almaty-Karachi road via the Karakoram Mountains (the Almaty-Bishkek-Kashgar-Karakoram-Islamabad-Karachi network) is functioning, although it transports a low volume of trade; trade volume will likely grow once the construction of the Gwadar port is complete (Ibid: 91).

Gwadar Port

Gwadar deep sea port will double the capacity of Pakistani oceanic trade and open a window to the sea for the landlocked countries in Central Eurasia. Rehabilitation of roads to Afghanistan from the Gwadar port will also give Afghan products greater export possibilities and shipping options. Gwadar is closer to Xinjiang than any other saltwater ports in China proper, and will reduce much of the transaction costs currently imposed on trade to and from Xinjiang. Central Asian states will benefit significantly as well, as the port opens the possibilities for promoting their oil trade globally, while Pakistan and Tajikistan are likely to reap

new transit fees. Pakistan is by far Afghanistan's most important trading partner in this region which is also called Greater Central Asia. Today, 85 percent of Afghanistan's exports are sent to Pakistan, while Pakistani exports to Afghanistan represent 15 percent of Afghan total imports. This strong bilateral trade results primarily from the improved political situation in Afghanistan, macro-economic stabilization in Pakistan, and a surge of Pakistani investment in Afghanistan (Stair, 2005: 6).

The construction of Gwadar port and related connecting routes with Afghanistan actually reduce these distances by approximately 500 km for Pakistan-Central Asia traffic. Pakistan and China are up-grading the Karakoram Highway (KKH). The two countries have agreed to open four new road links through the Khunjerab Pass bringing the total number of China-Pakistan roads links to eight. Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to initiate a bus service that would not only enhance trade but also be an important tool to promote people-to-people contacts between the four countries. Pakistani roads carry 89 percent of the country's passenger traffic and 96 percent of all inbound and outbound freight traffic. This reliance has made the development of road infrastructure a top priority. Due reconstruction, rehabilitation and NATO presence in Afghanistan Pakistan is the shortest and cheapest route to Afghanistan and Pakistani highways are used for huge NATO / coalition forces supplies. Pakistan is revitalizing its national highways with two-way double traffic lines; approximately 87 percent of this revitalization is now complete. The traffic on Pakistani national highways has almost doubled since the independence of the Central Asian states and the start of reconstruction in Afghanistan (Swanstrom, Norling & Li, 2011: 95).

Pakistan and Central Asia are major cotton producers and officials have suggested that both regions would benefit by initiating joint projects in cotton and textiles. Facilitating transportation inside Pakistan and Afghanistan may eventually encourage Pakistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to establish a world cotton cartel, either bilaterally or under ECO or all other frameworks. New transit routes via Pakistan and subsequent economic developments will help stabilize political processes throughout Central and South Asia (Ibid: 105). Improved transportation infrastructures and the reopening of Central Asia's traditional southern communication routes are likely to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI), contributing to peace and stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and throughout the region.

Afghanistan is working to rebuild a secure environment for its people and to re-establish a new Silk Road. The hope and potential for these new silk roads is that they will allow Central Asia once more to interact with South Asia, China and the Far East and to re-engage with Europe and beyond. Studying the potential benefits of North-South corridors, the ADB found that overall trade can increase

by as much as 15%, or \$12 billion, for the Greater Central Asia region as a whole if transportation and trade facilitation are improved (Aziz, n.d.: 37).

Road Corridors

The ADB study identified 52 potential road corridors through Afghanistan connecting Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan with five seaports in Pakistan and Iran. Thirty-one of these roads would link to Pakistan ports. The total distance of the combined corridors is about 13,586 kilometers or 8,444 miles. It is assumed that the corridors are to originate in Dushanbe for Tajikistan, Tashkent for Uzbekistan, and Ashgabat for Turkmenistan and then enter Afghanistan from Tajikistan at Shirkhan Bandar, from Uzbekistan at Hairatan and from Turkmenistan at Aqina. The corridors exit Afghanistan from Nangrahar province to Pakistan's ports at Torkham (leading to Karachi/Port Qasim) or via Afghanistan's Kandahar province at Spin Boldak (leading to Karachi or Gwadar). The above development would offer a large number of options for private transport through Afghanistan. For example, as many as fourteen routes connect Tajikistan and Pakistan via Kabul to the exit point at Torkham (Ibid: 39).

Once the corridors are built total regional trade will increase by 160% and combined transit trade will grow by 113%. Total exports among the participating countries by 2010 will increase by 14% (or \$5.8 billion) and total imports will grow by 16% (or \$6.7 billion). The impact on GDP as a result of trade via the corridors is also noteworthy. The ADB estimates that the combined GDP of the participant countries in the region will increase by over 5% per year during the next five years, for a total growth of \$5.9 billion. These benefits come at a relatively low cost as the corridors require a total investment of about \$5 billion for the entire region. With about 652,000 square kilometers, Afghanistan is a relatively large country and roads are its principal means of transport. Afghanistan's road network comprises about 6,100 km of national roads, 15,000 km of provincial roads, 15,000 to 20,000 km of rural roads, and 3,000 km of urban roads, including 1,060 km in Kabul. The national highways add up to about 3,300 km, the largest part of which, 2,300 km, is the ring road that connects Afghanistan's major regional centers of Herat, Kandahar, Maimana, Mazare-Sharif, Sheberghan and Kabul. These roads are also the main connectors to neighboring countries. With donor support, Afghanistan is now undertaking a massive infrastructure investment effort to rebuild this ring road. A total of 139 hours will be saved in travel time as a result of the new Corridors. This development will help the whole region particularly Central Asia because Central Asian countries, because of their legacies from the former Soviet-run economies, massive reliance on shipments by rail, coupled with the high cost of road transport, has led to a distorted export structure in Central Asia (Ibid: 45). The development

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of road corridors will open new types of trade flows which, in turn, will foster economic diversification for Central Asia and to the further benefit of the entire region.

Impediments

The infrastructural integration of the region is not an easy task to be accomplished in short time because impediments to regional trade are numerous including regional insecurity, terrorism and narcotics trafficking and production, infrastructure costs, and costs arising from the lack of proper legal and regulatory systems, restrictive trade policies, poor border management, and the absence of effective transport facilitation. They also include inadequately harmonized trade and customs procedures, lack of transparency, high levels of corruption, a large informal or illegal sector, a weak private sector, and the absence of vital services such as trade finance, banking, insurance, bonding, and telecommunication facilities. Due to Central Asia's landlocked character, when promoting long distance and continental trade one must focus on development of ports. In addition to Karachi and port Qasim the new deep-water port at Gwadar in Pakistan is also coming on line. According to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), part of the trade from Central Asia and beyond, could transit via Gwadar. The ECO study shows that as much as 40 percent of total transit can be channeled in this way (Alamgir, 2005: 28). The development of local ports can unlock the potential of the entire region. This will draw longer-distance partners, including China, Russia and India, on the one hand, and the Middle East and Europe on the other. The development of continental trade starts by developing local port capacity, improving efficiency, and implementing better trade facilitation strategies (Op. cit., n.d.: 50). It is vital to develop the institutions that can allow and encourage the informal sector to become formal besides devise short-term approaches towards specific solutions which can galvanize the participation of both small-scale and larger scale informal traders. The ADB plans to finance road corridor projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Ibid: 62; Op. cit., 2005: 28).

TAPI and TKPI Pipelines

(Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan and India Pipeline): Most of northern India and Pakistan are devoid of energy resources. Accounting for half of South Asia's GDP, this region has perhaps the scantiest endowment of hydrocarbons of any important economic zone on earth. On the other hand at the distance of few hundreds kilometers, the plains of Central Asia consisting of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and the northern regions of Afghanistan may hold as much as over 217

TCF (trillion cubic feet) of gas reserves, more than the estimates for Saudi Arabia's reserves. Failing to access Central Asian energy will endanger the economies of India and Pakistan at a time when neither can afford a pause in their growth. How is the South Asia region going to connect to Central Asia and solve its energy needs to support its massive growth? Two alternatives have been advanced: the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline and the Termez-Kabul-Peshawar-India (TKPI) pipeline. The Amu Darya basin of Uzbekistan contains significant reserves of natural gas. Adjacent areas of Afghanistan and Tajikistan remain less explored and have smaller proven natural gas reserves. However, estimates from Soviet times indicated that Afghanistan's Northern region may hold about 5 TCF of natural gas. Northern Afghanistan holds 18 times the oil and triples the natural gas resources previously thought. It is confirmed that over 15.6 TCF of natural gas (possibly up to 36.5 TCF) and about 1.6 billion barrels of oil (possibly up to 3.6 bbo) in the Amu Darya Basin not even counting the vast reserves of Turkmenistan (Ibid: 64).

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have agreed on the construction of TAPI (Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan and India Pipeline) or TAP (Trans-Afghan Pipeline). Realization of the Trans-Afghan Pipeline project will have substantial repercussions. It will raise the level of interdependence between India and Pakistan, contributing to their rapprochement. The TAP will enhance India's energy security and help to expand gas consumption in South Asia as a means for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Asian Development Bank supported a feasibility study to establish the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project aims to construct natural-gas transmission pipeline of 1,700 kilometers to transport 30 billion cubic meters of gas per year from Turkmenistan's Dauletabad gas fields to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and possibly to India. The route proposed is from Dauletabad to the Afghan cities of Herat and Kandahar and then to Multan in Pakistan. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline has been proposed to follow the route Dauletabad -Kandahar- Multan. However, there is an alternative route to connect the energy fields of Central Asia with the needs of South Asia: the Termez-Kabul-Peshawar-India route (TKPI). This pipeline would connect the southernmost city in Uzbekistan, Termez, to Kabul via the Mazar-i-Sharif and then would run from Kabul to Islamabad. Termez is 300 km from Kabul and Kabul is 200 km from Peshawar, which in turn is about 250 km from Islamabad. Extending this route to India would only require about 250 km via Lahore, the major economic center of Lahore- Amritsar (Ibid: 65).

The distance of the TKPI route is only half of TAPI's 1,700 km. It will take the pipeline through much more populated areas but still reach the same destinations in Pakistan and India. High-speed fiber optic cables can be installed inside the pipelines. These cables are part of a high capacity telecommunication SCADA (Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition) backbone system that can

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modernize the region's communication systems, provide a mechanism for developing regional telecom "hubs", and be a source of revenue not only for the governments but for local and regional businesses. Central Asia is endowed with huge hydroelectric potential, while Pakistan suffers from electricity shortages. At a June 2006 meeting in Turkey, representatives of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed an agreement to supply power from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. (Agreement on power supply project from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan signed (<http://www.paktribune.com/news/index.shtml?147111>)).

Inter-Regional Trade

Inter-regional trade among Central Asian States is relatively small. However, once the major regional economic powers of China, Iran, India, and Pakistan are added, intra-regional trade will also grow, to the point that it could reach more than half of total trading volume. This particular characteristic is now recognized as unlike any other developing region and makes this geographic area quite unique. There lies the exceptional opportunity to engage in closer regional cooperation to increase trade both within the region and with the major more distant partners via continental trade corridors. The development of road corridors will bring concrete benefits to all. Reduced travel time will bring participating countries annual savings of over \$1.7 billion and continental trade through new southern ports can be expected to increase by 80%, to \$6.3 billion. As the benefits of the trade corridors are extensive and long-term relative to the total investment of only about \$5.6 billion, the initiative has an undeniably compelling investment return (Op. cit., n.d.: 73).

Another important area in this integration process is Western China particularly its Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous region. Xinjiang connects the rest of the People Republic of China to Central Asia. The Xinjiang region accounts for over 80 percent of the total Chinese trade volume with Central Asia. (Wang, 2006) To transport energy supplies from the Gwadar port, China has made efforts in rehabilitating the 616 km Karakorum highway linking Pakistan with Xinjiang, although this is unlikely to carry more than a little oil. Plans are also underway to build a highway linking Gwadar with Kandahar and Islamabad, as well as to the east-west trunk railroad from Urumchi, capital of Xinjiang to Kashgar, an important trading city in Xinjiang near the border with Pakistan (Op. cit., 2011). At this juncture, trade between the Asia-Pacific region and Europe exceeds \$300 million per year, and stifling congestions at Chinese ports, combined with increasing freight rates for maritime shipments, have led Chinese producers to look for alternative overland trade routes. In comparison to the sea-routes via Asia and Europe, whose freight costs can reach as much as \$167 per ton and take 45

days, the second Eurasian land-bridge could cut transport time by more than half and cost only \$110 per ton. Instead of the 26,000 km detour to Europe by sea, the second Eurasian land-bridge reduces distance to 6,379 km, translating into a cost saving of 30 percent for forwarders promising significant transit fees and greater market access for Greater Central Asia not to mention the environmental benefits (Xinjiang Autonomous Region, 2005: 31). As per Deng Xiao Peng Plan the PRC has developed its southern parts particularly southern coastal area and now focusing on the development of its western region. For the development of Xinjiang and other provinces of the China's west Pakistani routes particularly Gwadar port can play important role.

In contrast to the empty talk of a "new Great Game" in Central Asia and its immediate surroundings, the reality is that the real "game" today is in the construction of infrastructure and the ability of "players" to be as well-connected as possible across region. Russia's monopoly of the Soviet time over Central Asian and Transcaucasia infrastructure is now slowly and gradually waning. International community is supporting Central Asia struggle for southern outlets which is culminating in greater market-access for these countries. Pipelines as well as transport routes are increasingly bypassing Russia - for example the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the trans-Caspian pipeline, the second Eurasian land-bridge, the bridges of the Panj River linking Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and all the other hundreds of projects proposed for the region. All these are opening new transport routes and trade outlets for the former Soviet dependents particularly Central Asian Republics and three Transcaucasian countries i.e., Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (Ibid: 419).

Global energy consumption is projected to increase by 57 percent from 2002 to 2025. Emerging economies are going to account for much of this projected growth. Among the emerging economies, the highest demand is expected to occur in Asia, particularly China and India. On the energy front, India is facing a huge challenge. Primary commercial energy demand grew almost three-fold at an annual rate of 6 percent between 1981 and 2001. In an effort to catch up with the rest of Asia and to reduce poverty, it is essential for India to continue growing at about 8 percent or more over the next 25 years. Even a conservative projection of India's energy needs to fuel this kind of growth will require that basis capacities in the energy sector and related physical infrastructure such as rail, roads, highways, and ports will have to grow by factors of 3 to 6 times by 2031 (Sachdeva, 2011: 348).

Energy consumption is expected to grow from a low of 5.5 percent per annum to high 6.2 percent per annum. With this current scenario, India's oil import dependency is likely to grow beyond the current level of 70 Percent. The difficult relationship between India and Pakistan is a major impediment to continental trade across Eurasia. Within ten years, India's trade with Europe, CIS, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan will be in the range of \$ 500 billion annually; Even if

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only 20 percent of this trade is conducted by continental land routes, \$ 100 billion worth of Indian trade will pass through the region (Ibid: 376). In order for regional cooperation to be successful, a regional economic initiative consisting of all Greater Central Asia countries that is China, India, Iran, Japan, Russia, Pakistan, Turkey and the United States is needed. It is only by the joint endeavor of all these countries that regional economic cooperation is going to be truly successful (Sachdeva, 2010: 160). An opening to the Indian Ocean is of great significance to the future of all Central Asia.

The Asia Development Bank, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Economic Cooperation Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe all support programs to rebuild transit routes and corridors of trade linking the Asian and European fringes of Eurasia. Turkmenistan's proven gas reserves stand at about 3,000bn cubic metres. The country exported some 60bn cubic metres of gas in 2006, 50bn of this to Russia and 6bn to Iran (http://www.cps.uz/eng/news/turkmen_gas_deal_extends_chinese_influence_in_central_asia_report.mgr). Turkmenistan in July 2007 granted a Chinese firm permission to develop land-based gas fields near the Uzbek border, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow also signed an accord to speed up implementation of an existing Turkmen-Chinese gas pipeline project. The two agreements mark the latest stage in a shift in Turkmen policy. With this new deal, Berdimuhamedow is continuing to keep his country's options open on new routes to markets in China, Pakistan and Europe (Gorst & Dickie, 2011). Central Asia has significant seasonal electricity surpluses and the potential to develop thousands of megawatts in new capacity. Its hydroelectric potential is particularly tempting. And gas and coal resources add to that capacity. For its part, South Asia needs energy to fuel its economic expansion. By 2015, Pakistan projects electricity demand to more than double. India's growing economy requires the addition of a nearly 50 percent increase in capacity by 2012. And while the Kyrgyz Republic currently earns about one U.S. cent per kilowatt hour on power sold northward, just think of the opportunities since Pakistan's generation costs average about 5 cents while India's cost for peaking power may be double even that (Feigenbaum, 2011: 2).

Conclusion

Pakistan's membership and association of the regional organizations namely SCO, SAARC and ECO lends the country a unique position to facilitate inter-regional cooperation. Pakistan and China are up-grading the Karakoram Highway (KKH). The two countries have agreed to open four new road links through the khunjerab pass, bringing the total number of China-Pakistan roads links to eight. Pakistan,

China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to initiate a bus service that would not only enhance trade but also be an important tool to promote people-to-people contacts between the four countries. Pakistan offers the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and inter-regionally. Pakistan's participation in these projects will symbolize the return of the Indus valley to the central place in region-wide economic and cultural interaction. The revitalization of the ancient trade links between south and central Asia and creation of new links particularly in the area of infrastructure; roads, electricity, communications will promote economic growth and regional cooperation. The new Silk Road could conceivably open up new markets and economic opportunities for the landlocked countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan and such a revival will restore historic ties between the regions and create new links in the areas of trade, transport, energy, good governance and communications.

Map of Central Asia



Source: Wikitravel.org

Map of Central Asia



Source: 4.bp.blogspot.com

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