

A Railway Future Project: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan in the Twenty-First Century

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: August 07,2025 Accepted: November 10,2025 Keywords : Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Center Asian, economic system, south Asia, Arabian Sea DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17582451	<i>Trade is vital for the concrete backbones of countries in the twenty-first century. Every country wishes to establish ties with other countries in order to increase exports and imports. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan have agreed to collaborate on a multibillion-dollar train project that would improve trade between Central and South Asia. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan have agreed on a strategic plan for a large railway project that would improve regional business and connectivity by providing direct access to the Arabian Sea for the landlocked region. The project would connect Pakistan's Peshawar city with Afghanistan's Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif towns, as well as Uzbekistan, along a 573-kilometer railway track. Passenger and freight high-speed trains will be included in the trilateral project connecting Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan. After the Taliban took control of Kabul on 15 August 2021, the Taliban announced the end of the fighting and war in Afghanistan. The Taliban has stated that they want to have good relationships all around the world. The Taliban have pledged to defend every Afghan citizen. All schools, colleges, universities, banks, stores, airports, and hospitals are open to the Taliban. It indicates that after regaining control of the situation in Afghanistan, the Italian government would take action. After the Taliban government changes their ideology, the railway project across three nations will be a positive step forward in the future. The Taliban administration also maintains the trade project for exports and imports products. The project will open Pakistani seaports on the Arabian Gulf to Uzbekistan and continue Afghanistan's gradual integration into the Central Asian economic system, which is expected to cost \$5 billion.</i>

Introduction

The trilateral negotiations attended by top officials from the three nations, a signing ceremony for the multibillion-dollar project took place in Tashkent. Razak Dawood, Pakistan's Advisor to the Prime Minister on Commerce and Investment, Sardor Umurzakov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments, and Hanif Atmar, Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, headed their respective nations. The passion and desire for global trade and business with Central Asia are evident at a high-level international conference on regional connectivity in Tashkent, (Saif, 2021).

The total project cost in US\$ 4.8 billion railway project linking Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan has already been inked, and it is expected to strengthen Pakistan-South Asia economic ties, High-speed passenger and cargo trains would be part of the trilateral project. The World Bank will provide a loan of \$4.8 billion to fund the railway link. Pakistan has been aware of the need of close connections with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) for regional connectivity, trade, and business since the CARs gained independence from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. As a result, a number of initiatives, such as the US\$ 1.16 billion CASA-1000 Project for exporting surplus hydroelectric power from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the US\$ 10 billion TAPI natural gas 1814-km pipeline project for gas energy from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, have been launched. (Rafiq, 21).

The Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Railway project is also a natural progression of Pakistan's and Uzbekistan's shared desire for regional connectivity. The following impact on regional connections is expected once the project is fully operational. The project faster trade and economic cooperation, early completion of preferential transit and trade agreements, enhanced security, and mutual engagement in the sectors of education, culture, and tourism are all expected to emerge from this train project. The current Tashkent conference on "regional integration" will also discuss "funding connectivity" on conditions that align these sovereign states' development goals with those of external stakeholders while maintaining their sovereignty. The solution is to abandon the Euro and the US currency in favour of local bond markets,(saif, 2021).

The Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project would be the first step in connecting Central Asia's transportation network with Pakistan's Gwadar, Karachi, and Qasim seaports. Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that when the effort is done, it will alter the entire regime's geo-economic dynamics. Prime Minister Imran Khan emphasized the importance of strengthening political and diplomatic ties, expediting trade and economic cooperation, completing the Preferential Trade Agreement and Transit Trade Agreement as soon as possible, increasing security and defence cooperation, and taking steps to deepen mutual collaboration in the fields of education, culture, and tourism. The Prime Minister also emphasised the importance of rail, road, and air connections, as well as the vast potential for expanding a mutually beneficial collaboration in a variety of sectors. It also drew attention to Pakistan's economic security paradigm and the change in emphasis to geo-economics. He emphasized the importance of Central Asia in this perspective, (Ali ,2021).

The three parties will perform a collaborative trip to inspect the route and its topography, as well as a preliminary feasibility analysis for the project, under the terms of the agreement. The route will connect with the current Termez, Uzbekistan – Mazar-e-Sharif cross-border line, which opened in January 2012 and provides direct train connectivity between Pakistan and Tashkent, Uzbekistan, (Cuenca, 2021).

Geography of central Asia

Central Asia is a region in Asia which stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to China and Mongolia in the east and from Afghanistan and Iran in the south to Russia in the north, including the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It's also a huge region with a diverse landscape that includes high hills and mountains (the Tian Shan), enormous deserts (the Kyzyl Kum, the Taklamakan), and notably treeless, grassland steppes. The enormous steppe regions of Central Asia and the steppes of Eastern Europe are grouped together as the Eurasian Steppe, a homogenous geographical zone.

Rail Project Details

The proposed rail link would connect Tashkent, Uzbekistan's city, with Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, and Peshawar, Pakistan. It would be 573 kilometres long. In Uzbekistan, the project is regarded as a once-in-a-century event. It aims to boost regional commerce and connectivity by providing landlocked Central Asia with direct access to Pakistan's Arabian Sea ports. This connection corridor is also known as the 'Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar project' on the Trans-Afghan railway line, (Rafiq, 21).

The Representatives from foreign financial institutions who attended the conference praised the proposal and pledged their full support for the project, which would be critical for regional economic development. The three nations had previously inked a collaborative plan to build the train link with a \$4.8 billion loan from international financial institutions. The 573-kilometer long trans-Afghan railway line 'Mazar-e-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar' project would link Pakistan's Peshawar city to Afghanistan's Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif cities, as well as Uzbekistan. Passenger and freight high-speed trains will be included in the trilateral project connecting Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, (Jamal, 2021).

Security challenges

The US departure from Afghanistan, regional security challenges have prompted Pakistan and Central Asian countries to engage in active dialogue (CARs). The withdrawal of US and NATO soldiers from Afghanistan was supposed to take place on September 11, 2021, however the military operation will finish on August 31, 2021, and two months ahead of schedule. Afghanistan's future is once again on the verge of being jeopardized because intra-Afghan discussions are nowhere close to an agreement, and the Taliban continues to wage violence against Afghan civilians and armed personnel. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all have a direct border with Afghanistan, making them vulnerable to Afghan spillover. Pakistan is also concerned about the situation. In this context, Central Asian nations have maintained connections with Pakistan as a result of regular high-level visits and discussions on a variety of bilateral topics, including commerce, economics, defence, and security.

The desire for trade and connections clashes with Pakistan's support for the Taliban's military victory. Economic cooperation can only be realized if Afghanistan is peaceful. The varied gauges of the railway and its link with Uzbekistan may provide a difficulty in the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Railway project. Pakistan employs a 1676mm gauge, while Afghanistan employs a 1435mm gauge. The Russian 1520mm gauge is used solely in Uzbekistan. The 1520mm gauge's non-conformity with adjacent rail trajectories has hampered Central Asia's connectivity, (Gupta, 2021).

Trade and energy project

Pakistan's trade with Central Asian nations is less than one billion dollars. Pakistan aspires for a stable Afghanistan, as well as increased trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan and Central Asia, following the United States' exit.

The energy resources of Central Asia are plentiful. As a result, the region is critical for Pakistan's power needs. Central Asian countries would get access to Pakistani markets in exchange for their high-quality cotton

and agricultural goods. Pakistan and Central Asia are now working on two energy projects. CASA-1000 (Central Asia-South Asia power project) was launched in 2016 with the goal of exporting surplus hydropower from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. By 2024, the project should be completed. The pace of work has been sluggish, and the project's viability is dependent on the situation in Afghanistan. Due to the unrest in the Af-Pak area, TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline) is in danger, (Gupta, 2021).

Conclusion

Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan have agreed on a 573-kilometer route connecting Mazar-e-Sharif and Peshawar through Kabul. The project will open Pakistani seaports on the Arabian Gulf to Uzbekistan and continue Afghanistan's gradual integration into the Central Asian economic system, which is expected to cost \$4.8 billion. The line will traverse over the Hindu-Kush range and reach a height of 3,500 metres when completed, making it one of the world's highest railroads. The route will put supply chain abilities to the test, and it will be tough to persuade employees and firms to operate in Afghanistan, where the Taliban still wield substantial regional power.

This new railway link would be the quickest route between Central and South Asia, and it would connect Pakistan's seaports to Central Asian and Eurasian railway networks, enhancing trade flows and strengthening the regional economy. The initiative would help Afghanistan achieve peace and stability by providing tens of thousands of new jobs. The construction of a railway line linking Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, and Peshawar would significantly reduce the time and cost of moving products. According to estimates, products would arrive in Karachi in 16-18 days from the Russian border (Ozinki), and 8-10 days from Termez. The annual amount of railway cargo is also anticipated to exceed 20 million tones. Transportation costs have been reduced. the cost of carrying a container from Tashkent to Karachi via this newly planned railway link may be approximately US\$ 1400-1600, which is half the cost of transporting a container from Tashkent to Bandar Abbas, which costs US\$ 2600-3000. Apart from providing the quickest access to warm seas, the Kabul Corridor, in conjunction with the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan transit corridor, would connect four economically powerful Eurasian areas — Europe, China, Russia, and South Asia – through Central Asia.

The Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line would cut the time and expense of carrying products over the current route between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul, while electricity lines from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are being extended to Kabul and across Afghanistan.

Project completion is contingent on the present state of things in Afghanistan; if the Taliban topple the Asharf Ghani administration and install a new Taliban rule in Kabul, the project will be finished on time. The project will be finished on schedule if the Taliban beat the Asharf Ghani administration and create a new Taliban rule in Kabul. After the Taliban take control of Kabul and rule the government, some Taliban sources intend to continue working on this project.

The project's completion is dependent on the current state of affairs in Afghanistan; when the Taliban overthrow the Asharf Ghani administration and install a new Taliban government in Kabul, the project will be completed on schedule. The project will be completed on time if the Taliban defeat the Asharf Ghani government and establish Taliban authority in Kabul. When the Taliban seize power, he Taliban have taken control of Kabul and now run the government; the Taliban are well on their way to completing their mission in full force, according to open thinking sources.

Taliban took control of Kabul on 15 August 2021; the Taliban announced the end of the fighting and war in Afghanistan. The Taliban has stated that they want to have good relationships all around the world. The Taliban have pledged to defend every Afghan citizen. All schools, colleges, universities, banks, stores, airports, and hospitals are open to the Taliban. It indicates that after regaining control of the situation in Afghanistan, the Taliban, government would take action. After the Taliban government changes their ideology, the railway project across three nations will be a positive step forward in the future. The Taliban administration also maintains the trade project for exports and imports products.

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