

## **LAPIS LAZULI CORRIDOR AND ITS FUTURE**

**Khurshid Sultonov**

Student of Tashkent state university of oriental studies

[Sultonovxurshid425@gmail.com](mailto:Sultonovxurshid425@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

*This article discusses in detail the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, one of the most important transport corridors in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as in Afghanistan, and how transcorridors play a role in modern life. At the same time, attention will be paid to the strengths and weaknesses of the corridor, as well as the opportunities and threats that may arise as a result of no this road. In addition, this article provides detailed information on the contracts being concluded for this transcorridor.*

**Keywords:** diversification, “One Belt, One Route”, mutual integration, transit trade, multimodal form, Pak-Indian conflict, railway tracks standards.

### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

*В данной статье подробно рассматривается Лазуриновый коридор, один из важнейших транспортных коридоров в Центральной Азии и на Кавказе, а также в Афганистане, и то, какую роль транспортные коридоры играют в современной жизни. При этом внимание будет уделено сильным и слабым сторонам коридора, а также возможностям и угрозам, которые могут возникнуть в результате отсутствия этой дороги. Кроме того, в данной статье представлена подробная информация о заключаемых договорах по данному транскоридору.*

**Ключевые слова:** диверсификация, «Один пояс, один маршрут», взаимная интеграция, транзитная торговля, мультимодальная форма, пакистано-индийский конфликт, стандарты железнодорожных путей.

### **INTRODUCTION**

At the current time, the process of mutual integration in the international community is reaching a high level. Because the economic, political, and social interconnectedness and centralization of nations has reached the level of state attention. One of the tools that directly influences this integration is the railway system. At the same time, one of these transport corridors, the Lapis lazuli corridor, has a unique place in the international community. As a result of the use of this corridor, the participating countries, which are on the verge of economic collapse during the pandemic, can recover their economies through transit trade and mutual

trade. It should be noted that at the same time, the need for large volumes of goods has significantly decreased in the context of the protracted global financial and economic crisis. In addition, transcontinental railways allow cargo to be delivered several times faster than ships, as well as by bypassing long distances across seas and oceans and making it shorter. Mobility, efficiency and less dependence on intermediary countries by rail are the hallmarks of the railway system. The use of this Lapis lazuli corridor is currently one of the main tasks for any state. Because the use of this corridor has a direct impact on the diversification of the national economy, the opening of new markets, the process of integration, the economic and social life of countries. It also determines the relevance of this corridor through a series of meetings and agreements on the operation of the corridor.

## **METHODS**

In this article systematic and SWOT analysis have been adequately used

## **RESULTS**

The name of the corridor is derived from the ancient mineral lapis, one of the main exports from Central Asia to the Middle East, Europe and North Africa. Negotiations to build this new corridor date back to 2012 and lasted five years due to a number of factors in the region, including security issues, economic instability across Central Asia and the legacy of underdeveloped infrastructure networks, and member states participated. The transport and transit agreement on the Lojuvard route was signed on the initiative of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Economic Cooperation of Afghanistan Wahidullah Waissi. The agreement is aimed at expanding regional economic cooperation and ties between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, thereby expanding economic and cultural ties between Europe and Asia. The initiative aims to improve transport infrastructure and procedures (including road, rail and sea), increase exports and expand the economic opportunities of citizens of countries using this new transport corridor. Barriers to regional trade and transit and transaction costs will be partially reduced through a new Customs Integration Procedure and a new Cross-Border Transport Agreement between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Its expected impact is significant not only because most of the necessary infrastructure is already in place, but also because the bulk of the required investment is in improving policy and governance. Four technical discussions have taken place in this area, most recently in 2016. It took place in Baku on November 15-16 and the text of the agreement was finalized. The VII Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan

(RECCA VII) Ministerial Meeting was held in Ashgabat on November 14-15, 2017. The ministerial meeting will be attended by high-ranking representatives of about 40 countries and international organizations. Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the route on December 13, 2018 at a ceremony in Herat. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the route on December 13, 2018 at a ceremony in Herat. The first trucks transported 175 tons of cotton, dried fruit and sesame seeds. In 2019, deliveries of goods and merchandise along the Lapis Lazuli corridor were carried out periodically. In particular, a consignment of Kashmir weighing 17 tons and about \$ 1 million was transported from Afghanistan via the Lapis-Lazuli corridor.

### ***Strength***

There are some advantages to this approach, and they include:

- Trailways allow cargo to be delivered several times faster than ships, as well as by bypassing long distances across seas and oceans and making it shorter. The peculiarity of this transport corridor is that it is shorter than the sea route and relatively cheap.

- Trailway project is supported by the participants of the state project. The project is in the best interests of the participating States and will work to make it happen. For example, Turkmenistan's goal is to avoid being influenced by China, a major buyer of oil and gas, and to supply the European energy market with its own products.

- The construction of this corridor is supported by the United States. Because the corridor is not accessible to the main rival power centers of the United States, in particular, Russia, China and Iran, and the use of this corridor will not increase their influence in the region.

- The Lapis lazuli corridor will diversify Afghanistan's transit routes and is interpreted as the shortest, cheapest and most reliable way for Afghanistan to trade with Europe. According to the ministry, it takes less than 16 days for Afghan goods to reach Europe via the Lapis-Lazuli road, while it takes more than 20 days for the same goods to reach Europe through the port of Karachi, causing dozens of problems.

- The presence of a multimodal form. This will in some ways reduce dependence on vehicles and participating countries. In other words, it can be used for rail, sea and road transit.

### ***Weakness***

On the other hand, it is no secret that the structure and operation of this transcorridor has some shortcomings. These shortcomings include:

- The project is against the interests of Russia and Iran. Because this corridor connects Europe, which needs oil and gas, and thus the participating countries supply Europe with oil and natural gas. This could pose a threat to Russia, Europe's main supplier. The reason for Iran's opposition to the project is that the corridor will not pass through its territory. Currently, the dispute over the territorial boundaries of the Caspian Sea and strong opposition from Iran and Russia are delaying the project.

- Non-compliance of railway track standards (1526mm in Turkmenistan, 1435mm in Turkey and 1676mm in Pakistan) Also, there are no clear standards in Afghanistan. There are three types of standards in the country: Soviet-era standards, universal standards, and Indian measurement standards.

- It is known that for economically underdeveloped Afghanistan, this corridor is mainly used for trade in agricultural products. Obviously, Afghan fruit and cotton are not enough to sustain the project. In addition, it is much easier to transport them to Europe via Central Asia and Russia. This is one of the weakest points of the transcorridor.

- In transportation, the government should cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and issue visas to drivers. Visa is the most serious problem, especially with visas from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

### ***Opportunity***

This project will create different opportunities. For example:

- Opportunity to provide permanent employment to the Afghan people and to prevent armed conflict between different Afghan tribes. As a result, the socio-economic situation of the population is improving, which has a direct impact on various political struggles.

- As a result, the role of the participating states as a transit country will increase and they will be able to earn more from the share of transit. Having this opportunity is one of the main reasons for the participation of these countries.

- Also, this corridor has access to the leading regional power centers, Pakistan and India as well. It is clear that this corridor will not be developed only by Afghanistan's trade in agricultural products. As a result, it could be used as an alternative to the International North-South Corridor for India. Pakistan could also become a participant in this corridor. Furthermore, this is the shortest and fastest way for Pakistan to get to Europe. The Pakistani government also attended the Ashgabat summit.

- Today, the road can be used as an energy and trade corridor connecting Central Asia, Afghanistan and China with Turkey and Europe.

- The road could be connected to China's "One Belt, One Road" project in the future. Historically, the Lojuvard Corridor has been part of the Great Silk Road. Through this, we can be sure that the corridor has a future.

- The Lapis lazuli Corridor will be connected to Turkey's Middle Corridor Project (East-West Trans-Caspian Trade and Transport Corridor) and will complement other existing regional transport corridors, such as the Five State Railway Corridor. It has a direct impact on the forces in the region.

### ***Threats***

However, there are threats that will hinder the launch and development of this project, which will directly affect the fate of the project. For example:

- There are a risk of various armed conflicts in the areas of Afghanistan where the this video meeting.railway passes. It is known that it is very difficult to build a railway through the region, which has not achieved political stability and is currently struggling between different ethnic groups.

- Risk of smuggling weapons, drugs and psychotropic substances by rail.

- Against this background, the new Pak-Hind conflict is already intensifying and in danger of turning into a military confrontation. There is a risk that the construction and development of this corridor will be associated with the names of these two major regional power centers.

- Organize various meetings on the alternative railway project. That is, on January 16, 2021, a trilateral online meeting of the leaders of the interagency group of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, organized to expand the capabilities of the Lojuvard corridor through cooperation in the field of transport and communications. According to Turkmenistan, the meeting was attended by Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan for Transport and Communications Bayramgeldi Ovezov, Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Shahin Abdulla oglu Mustafayev and former Acting Chairman of the Central Bank of Afghanistan Ajmal Ahmadi. Georgia may be denied participation due to this video meeting.

- In connection with the "One Belt, One Road" project, China's influence in the region will undoubtedly increase. Undoubtedly, it will have enough economic and political power in these areas.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, first of all, all the countries involved in this project will have the opportunity to integrate into the entire system of the Euro-Asian land corridor, which

will include railways and highways, gas and oil pipelines, development of old ports and construction of new ports. In the Caspian and Black Seas. For Afghanistan and Central Asia, the lack of direct access to the sea and ocean in line with global geopolitical developments may be the most friendly and promising path for the EU. Because Central Asia has traditionally been rich in resources that are increasingly needed by the West. At the crossroads of Central and South Asia is Afghanistan, which could take on the role of transit. As a result, this transport corridor is so important that it has a direct impact on the social, economic and political aspects of the Eurasian region. We can say that the Lojuvard corridor is a transport corridor of international importance. It should be noted that the future of this corridor is in doubt.

First, the Taliban, which came to power in Afghanistan, has so far not come to a definite conclusion about this path. The Taliban's main focus is on the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor. Also, its main issue today is an attempt to be recognized by the international community.

Second, there are ongoing meetings on alternative routes to Europe. Examples are the Transafgan Transport Corridor and the International North-South Corridor.

Third, there are problems with funding in this area in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, the existence of other social and economic problems of the Taliban movement other than this corridor is causing the current financial problem of this corridor.

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