

The Dreaded Railway to Herat and China; An Opportunity to Shift the Goeconomic Situation

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Abstract:

Objectives and Background: To analyze how the creation and expansion of an international railway network from Iran to Afghanistan and China, directly or via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, can facilitate transport and cultural communication and relations with Europe and the Western world.

If the railway from Khaf in eastern Iran to Herat in Afghanistan is completed and built, and the Herat-Kashgar railway corridor in China is established, a suitable platform will be created for the development of infrastructure, economic investment, especially in mining, and interaction and exchange between countries. This plan will digitize the revival of the Silk Road and the modern Eastern civilization for the development and welfare of the people and will transform the geopolitical and geostrategic situation of this land into a goeconomic situation.

Conclusion: Despite the important functions, threats and challenges of this strategic plan.

1. The Iranian government's delay in completing the "Khaf to Herat" railway,
2. The possibility of extending the railway with Russian standards from Mazar-e-Sharif to Herat and Kabul in continuation of the newly created railway from the Hairtan region on the border of Uzbekistan to Mazar-e-Sharif, and
3. The possibility of extending the railway with the Indian subcontinent standard from Spin Boldak, Pakistan to Kandahar, Afghanistan and weakening the goeconomic position of Herat in the near future.

Any negligence regarding the railway construction on the dangerous route to Kashgar will result in irreparable international losses for European countries, China, and countries in the region, especially Iran and Afghanistan, in the future.

Keywords: *Khaf to Herat Railway, Herat to Kashgar Corridor, Silk Road, Khaf to Kashgar, Goeconomic Location*

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INTRODUCTION

In the age of communications, globalization, and the use of virtual and electronic space, real interaction, especially the facilitation of economic and commodity relations, and the creation of social space, are of great importance.

Production and trade relations in modern society are more dependent than ever on the transportation system and the transportation system of countries. In regions such as eastern Iran and Afghanistan, which are located in the heart of the world's arid regions, nationwide railway networks are of extraordinary importance. Without them, effective access to the open waters of the world or the transportation of goods to other regions, such as western Iran and European countries, would be very difficult and in the long term, considering the changes in energy prices.

The emergence of China's growing economic power in the world and the economic rise of the great country of India in the future and the importance of economic relations between Europe and these regions have increased the strategic importance of the location of Iran and Afghanistan as an intermediate link between the East and the world, and the route and time of transportation of goods are gradually gaining more priority.

Eastern Iran is the main route of the ancient and prosperous Silk Road, which, as a result of the geopolitical developments of the 18th century and the Russian domination of northeastern and western Iran, created one-third of the iron borders of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and on the other hand, British control over the subcontinent of India and Pakistan and the formation of the country of Afghanistan have created a long-term blockade.

With the expansion of the maritime transport system and the use of large ships to transport goods in the southern regions of Iran and India, this great transportation and civilization corridor began to decline, and a historical deadlock began in the eastern regions, which led to poverty, backwardness, and insecurity spreading in this system, to the point that some Western experts consider Afghanistan to be the end of the civilized world and a manifestation of insecurity, drugs, a breeding ground for extremist terrorism, and a source of injustice to the rights of women and children. And they paint a picture of a land that was once the heart of Asian civilization as being far more backward than Africa.

Since Afghanistan and Tajikistan are landlocked, the creation of an international railway network is of strategic importance for their development. With the creation of appropriate railways in these countries, eastern Iran, which is adjacent to its border, will also be freed from historical, economic, and social deadlock, and extraordinary social and economic conditions will be created for the progress and development of this region, and in this way, the transition from a geopolitical situation to a geoeconomic situation will be possible. It will be. In the last two decades, with the creation and operation of the northeast-southeast railway network from the cities of Tajan and Sorkhs on the border with Turkmenistan and the route from Mashhad to Bafq and Bandar Abbas, and the construction of a section of the west-east route through the Heidriya, Khaf, Sangan to Herat, new hopes have been raised, and with the extension of this route from Afghanistan to China, India and the countries of Central Asia, it will establish the main infrastructure of the modern Eastern civilization

for the welfare of the people and the development of these regions. The first phase of this project from west to east, from Torbat Haidriya to Sangan, was constructed and operated from 1381 to 1384 after its approval in 1380 in the budget law of the Islamic Council of Ministers. However, the problem is that there have been long delays and delays in the implementation of the second phase, which is called the “Fear of Herat” project, and its policy-making and planning are mostly related to the Iranian government and affect the national and international interests of the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan. Although some of the infrastructure of this phase of the project has been completed to the living city of Afghanistan, it is necessary to complete and continue this project to the city of Herat as soon as possible, and to provide further steps with the assistance of the Afghan government to connect the network to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province, Afghanistan. The main problem and issue becomes more evident when we know that the delay in the implementation of this project has posed international strategic threats to the national interests of the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan, and the rival country, especially Russia, which is always on the lookout for special opportunities to seize Afghanistan and Iran, has never excluded the desire to access the open waters of the world and the Persian Gulf from its strategic agenda. The main problem lies in the difference and contradiction of the rail widths and their specifications for the three railway networks. Afghanistan has neighboring countries, which include: 1- German French standard railways and Iran-China railways (1435 mm wide rails), 2- Russian standard railways in Central Asia (1520 mm wide rails), 3- Indian subcontinent standard railways in Pakistan (1676 mm wide rails). Any country that succeeds in expanding its railway network standards in Afghanistan will have greater success in expanding the network and influencing its economic and social affairs. The country will be successful.

Russia has been investing, building, and operating a railway with Russian standards from Herat on the border of Uzbekistan to Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, following the Iranian government's delays and procrastination in implementing the dreaded project to Herat and expanding the European rail network into that country, through assistance to the Uzbek government, and is considering the possibility of continuing the Russian standards to Herat and Kabul. If this is done, the territory and scope of the Iranian European railway network will be stopped and groundless in Herat.

On the other hand, if Pakistan creates the 102-kilometer Spin Boldak-Kandahar route with quasi-continental standards, Herat's geoeconomic position will be severely weakened and trade between Iran and Afghanistan will reach the minimum possible level.

Our main hypothesis in this article is that the more the Russian railway penetrates into Afghanistan, or any move by Pakistan to extend its railway to Afghanistan before the international railway network is expanded to European-Afghan standards, the aspirations of connecting the West to the East with the aim of connecting railway lines from Europe to China via Iran and Afghanistan will face numerous obstacles and problems.

The least the Iranian government needs to do is accelerate the completion of the Khaf-Herat railway and its operation. By completing this important task, China will become more interested in connecting its rail network to Afghanistan. The government and people of Afghanistan are concerned about joining the Central Asian bloc economically and socially, or becoming more dependent on Pakistan,

and facing triple disruption and disruption to their most important international infrastructure with the construction of three different railway lines. It is obvious that this country will find hope and the possibility of further and faster development by connecting to the Asian and European international network.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative method and a combination of documentary and historical methods techniques were used based on the use of documents, records, information, archival sources, and official and valid statistics that exist at the national and international levels.

This is a necessity for all research that conducts a scientific study of phenomena and objective realities with great success and at broad levels. [Tavakol, 1990: 46] In the use of documents and history, the researcher sometimes uses methods Inference is used to complete information and analyze phenomena. (Saroukhani, 2004 ; Giddens, 2004)

The documentary method is based on a type of description and interpretation that results from the analysis of a set of documents and reliable information about phenomena [Bailey, 1994]. In this method, written language and existing information are considered and referenced, and in terms of cognition and technique, it is close to the components of the interpretive paradigm [Mogalakwe, 2006]. From Gosfield's perspective, examining each document is like looking through a window into a room, through which the researcher observes people, actions, and realities. (Flik et al., 2004).

In the historical method, geography and politics are addressed, especially policy-making and planning. This method is based on the unit of analysis of the country or multinational and emphasizes the scope and territory of the nation-state in any study. This type of research is based on a causal model based on conditional causality, temporal order, continuity, and elimination of alternatives (Neuman, 1997).

In the documentary method, the accuracy of documents and their use in the analysis are addressed in precise and transparent ways (Sadeghi Fasaee & Erfan Manesh, 2015)

In the process of examining the subject of this research and analysis There is a collection of documents and reports on how the Khaf, Herat and China railway was built, and given the importance of this important strategic project for the development of countries, governments in Iran, Afghanistan, China and Uzbekistan have published reliable documents, documents, information and reports on this subject in recent years.

Considering that a part of the Torbat-Heidriya, Khaf and Sangan railway axis has been implemented in Iran, and also considering the history of railways in remote distances in Afghanistan and the implementation of the railway from the Hairtan region to Mazar-e-Sharif, there is information, documents and evidence in this regard to continue these projects and create a rail network in Afghanistan and expand it among countries of common interest. In this research, based on the goal of moving from the geopolitical and geographical axis of implementing these projects and transforming it into a the opportunity and creation of the geo-economic situation have been examined and analyzed.

Taking into account the distinction made in the definition of documents as standard written or recorded information to express a part of reality from the definition of records as any written statement [Guba, & Lincoln 1985], in this study, the concepts and key words that are the main pillars for presenting the interpretation of phenomena and issues of the method in documents are presented.(Flik et al, 2004: 284; Bryman, 1988: 68)

Table 1. Funds for the plan to facilitate transportation from Iran's eastern borders in the 2002 budget

<i>Row</i>	<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Credit Amount</i>
1	Construction of railways and improvement and asphaltting of roads in Khorasan province	120 billion rials per year
2	Torbat-Heydariyeh-Sangan-Herat Railway	100 billion rials per year
3	Improvement and asphalt coating of Torbat Heydariyeh-Rashtkhar-Khaf-Taybad road	6 billion rials per year
4	Improvement and asphaltting of the Khaf-Qaen (Ibrahim Abad)-Taybad-Dogharun road.	7 billion rials per year
5	Improvement and asphaltting of the Fariman-Torbat Jam-Taybad-Dogharun road.	7 billion rials per year
6	Improvement and asphaltting of roads in Sistan and Baluchestan province	70 billion rials per year
7	Improvement and asphaltting of Zahedan-Khash road	30 billion rials per year
8	Improvement and asphaltting of Chabahr-Nikshahr-Iranshahr road	30 billion rials per year

Primary documents such as memoranda of understanding and letters related to national and international official organizations [Bailey, 2008:240] and secondary information and statistics (1.1984: Kamis, & Stewart) are mostly written and extracted from reliable reports based on the purpose and direction of the research. Authenticity, credibility and significance have been the guiding principles for accepting or rejecting each document. Sampling of documents is based on a deliberate and theoretical method. Considering the focus and objectives of the research, reliable information, observations, and professional experiences of the researcher in this specific topic. Using some first-hand sources, such as access to reports and agreements from the French company Soufril and letters and legal and budgetary documents from the Islamic Council and the government regarding an important part of the subject of this research, is another advantage that is reported for the first time in a scientific study. The use of secondary data included in reputable national and international reports and their systematic classification and reporting as shown in Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1 has contributed to the practical and developmental dimensions of the research. Keywords, as is common in documentary and historical research for guidance and commitment to the main topic, have been used to access important materials in primary sources, in library research and in electronic sources. In the next stage, a systematic review of documents and evidence was conducted by revisiting the research questions. In this research method, systematic review acts like a sieve and with accurate,

organized, and planned identification of the documents and evidence of the research subject, deeper dimensions of the phenomenon and reality can be revealed. (Hall, 2003: 92)

Table 2. Railway distance from Afghanistan to Europe, Russia and the high seas of the world

<i>Distance of Afghanistan Railway to Europe</i>	
Khawf-Herat	191 km
Herat-Sangan (mine)	170 km
Sangan-Torbat Heydariyeh	146.5 km
Torbat Heydariyeh-Kashmar Station (Tehran-Mashhad dual line)	107.5 km
Kashmar Station-Tehran	833 km
Tehran-Razi Station (Turkish border)	958 km
Herat-Turkish border-Istanbul	2215 km
Distance of Afghanistan Railway to Persian Gulf	
Herat-Sangan (mine)	170 km
Sangan-Torbat Heydariyeh	146.5 km
Torbat Heydariyeh-Bafq	605.5 km
Bafq-Bandar Abbas	626 km
Kerman-Zahedan	545 km
Herat-Open waters of Persian Gulf	1548 km
Distance of proposed sections of the proposed railway inside Afghanistan	
Herat-Lashkargah	555 km
Lashkargah-Kandahar	136 km
Kandahar-Kabul	495 km
Lashkargah-Spin Boldak (Southeast)	101 km
Lashkargah-Tarako (southwest)	409 km
Kabul-Amu Darya (Mazar-e-Sharif and north towards Russia)	587 km
Mazar-e Sharif-Hairatan (implemented with Russian line)	80 km

Conceptual classification and identification of components to better understand the structural features of the text and clarify the point that according to the content analysis method, what does the text of each document say? It has also been observed in the examination of documents and reports. (Flik, 2013: 277) .Statistical theoretical interpretation of the analysis of the data set and research findings has been carried out according to the table of documentary research, and in the reanalysis of documents and data, with a re-evaluation of hypotheses, attention has been paid to logical arguments and their frequency of repetition for theoretical conclusions based on empirical realities, as is the case in the examination of social phenomena by theorists. (Bebby, 2009)

Final report and compilation to present a point of view extracted from multiple sources Two important criteria in interpretive explanations of documentary methods, namely "semantic sufficiency" based on a reliable and credible narrative and "causal sufficiency" i.e. knowledge of various backgrounds, arguments and consequences have been observed (Benton & Crib, 2007:157)

FINDINGS

The history of communication infrastructure in eastern Iran and Afghanistan

Until the early 15th century AD, this region enjoyed the highest level of infrastructure and commercial and trade facilities compared to other parts of the world.

The creation of long paved stone roads on the route of large cities, as well as the establishment of caravanserais equipped for recreation and the exchange of goods and economic and commercial information, are among the most important features of the eastern regions.

This theory has also always been put forward that roads and caravanserais have played an important role in the development of production, trade, and the prosperity of Eastern civilizations, and it can be said that the peak of the prosperity and civilization of Iran and Afghanistan was a function of the development and destruction of the country's roads and caravanserais.

As the peak of the development of roads and caravanserais during the reign of Shah Abbas corresponds to the prosperity of all of Iran and Afghanistan, and its destruction corresponds to the complete destruction of the country at the end of the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein and Nader Shah. During the time of Shah Abbas, Iran was one of the world's trading centers.

Shah Abbas ordered the establishment of numerous caravanserais on the country's highways. Merchants who came to Iran from the east and west of the world could stay in these places and at the same time learn about all matters of world trade.

Nicolas Davart-Ta-Reblo, a Portuguese agent in India, during his journey through Iran, wrote about one of the caravanserais in his visit to Shiraz during the time of Shah Abbas: "The number of rooms on two floors is over one hundred and thirty huts, and we met travelers there from all countries, such as Persians, Arabs, Turks, Buddhists, Venetians, Greeks, Armenians, Hungarians, and Jews. If someone has gold there, he can be sure that not even a pinch of it will be lost, even if a needle If it is lost there, the guardians must pay for it."(Tavasoli & Mohammad Toosaki, 2005)

With the boom in production and trade in Iran, Shah Abbas tried to find a new waterway through Russia or the Persian Gulf to export Iranian silk and other industrial goods to Europe and the far corners of the world.(Foran, 2003)

Will Durant wrote in his book "The History of Civilization" that Iran was the middle link between the ancient civilizations of eastern China and India and southern Europe and Egypt, the way The Great Khorasan from Baghdad to Balkh during the Abbasid period and the communication routes during the Safavid period with numerous caravanserais were examples of the importance of transit of goods in Iran.

The Silk Road, or the East-West (Asia-Europe) communication bridge, began in the city of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in eastern China and ended in Europe in the cities of Rome and Venice. This road, which was more than twelve thousand kilometers long, was eighteen centuries old (from 200 BC to 1600 AD) and, starting from the city of Xi'an in China, after crossing the Pamir Plateau, it connected to the cities of Merv, Samarkand, Balkh and Mavruhinhar. Neyshabur was the first city in present-day Iran to be located on this road. And after passing through Damghan, Gorgan, Rey, Qazvin, Hamadan and other cities of Iran, it ends at Seleucia and Antioch (Turkey) on the Mediterranean coast.

The other branch of the Silk Road connected India to Tus (Mashhad) in Iran, and Persian was widely spoken on many of the Silk Road routes.

The 12,000-kilometer Silk Road caravan route began in the late 14th century AD, following the spread of industrial and modern goods and the use and expansion of sea routes to It gradually lost its commercial importance and the land that had been the most prosperous crossroads of the world for centuries became a dead end. (Papoli Yazdi & Vossughi, 2003)

In the middle years of the 20th century and the expansion of new political and economic relations between Europe and Asia, land transport flourished again and an important part of the Silk Road was revived after several centuries with the construction of the Trans-Russian Railway (TSR).

There are numerous limitations and deprivations in the theoretical and practical approach to economic and social development in eastern Iran and Afghanistan, and in explaining the stages of development, like all regions whose economies are still in the stage of subsistence agriculture and on a small scale, and there are no production and trade relations between different sectors and industries, it would be more appropriate in development planning to focus on public investment plans that aim to create the necessary conditions for the beginning of economic change. "It is, to be focused." (Todaro, 1985)

In this regard, some theorists have emphasized the consideration of priorities and especially the preparation of infrastructure and development infrastructures such as roads, water, energy and communications (Lewis, 1991).

Dr. Mohammad Hossein Papoli Yazdi has proposed the creation and establishment of a railway network between Islamic countries in order to achieve regional convergence and synergy for the development of infrastructure in the countries of the West Asian region (Papoli.Yazdi, 1994)

In order to increase the credibility of the research method, the method and policy of "three stratifications" i.e. use of reliable sources (especially hand sources) First, national and international), referring to diverse and multiple sources, consulting with specialists and experts, and respecting the principles of research ethics (especially in the documentary method) have been the criteria and standards of the various stages of this research.

Developing new infrastructure in Iran to revive the Silk Road.

Although the proposal to build roads and railways to save this landlocked region has been proposed for the past five decades, in the last decade (1996-2005) a series of major strategic and infrastructure

projects have been implemented in Iran in the form of road and railway networks, energy networks, and communications.

Following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, strategic and important projects in Afghanistan and eastern Iran were put on the agenda of the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, providing a hopeful outlook for the revival of the Silk Road. Some of the most important of them are briefly mentioned:

North-South Railway Network

After World War II, in continuation of the Trans-Russian Railway (TSR), the Soviet Union presented the North-South Corridor project as a strategic goal to connect the cold Siberian plains to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the open seas of the world. At that time, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev said that our dream was to have access to the open waters of the world, and the outline of this grand strategic plan was drawn up with a distance of more than 1,000 kilometers from Turkmenistan (the Soviet border) to Bandar Abbas (the Persian Gulf). However, the conditions of the Cold War and the inclination of the Iranian government (the Pahlavi government) towards America, the Afghan revolution (1978), the Soviet invasion of that country (1978), and the Islamic revolution in Iran (1978)) prevented the implementation of this plan. The project was delayed.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the landlocked Commonwealth of Independent States in Central Asia, the needs of these countries and the need to develop trade and exchange of goods led the Iranian government to build the 180-kilometer Mashhad-Sorkhs-Tajm railway project between Iran and Turkmenistan in 1989.

In continuation of this project, in 1997, the project to build the 780-kilometer Mashhad-Bafq railway project towards Bandar Abbas (Persian Gulf) in Iran began. It was completed and put into operation in the spring of 2004.

The north-south railway network passes through the eastern region of Iran (Khorasan) and has created abundant socio-economic potential for the cities of Sorkhs, Mashhad, and Torbat-e-Heydariyeh in this province and neighboring provinces including Kerman, Yazd, Isfahan, Hormozgan, and Sistan and Baluchestan, and has enabled northern and eastern neighbors to access the waters of the Persian Gulf and the open sea through the routes of Tajan (Turkmenistan) and Herat (Afghanistan). Provides.

Increasing the justification for investment in mineral reserves and establishing connections between them in Iran, such as the iron ore of Sangan Khaf, the coal of Tabas, the iron ore of Chadermalo, the three chahoun, Chaghart, Gol Ghar, and the copper of Sorcheshmeh, are other consequences of the aforementioned plan. The implementation of this plan is the most important step of the Iranian government in the last 80 years in the field of land development, transportation, and the expansion of economic and international exchanges. With the implementation of the Mashhad-Bafaq railway project, the socio-economic reasons and justifications for the development of the railway network in Afghanistan have also increased.

The creation of a railway network in the east of the country, in addition to increasing the possibility of interaction and development between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan with Iran in terms of land use and urbanization of the east of the country, is a fundamental step in creating infrastructure for investing in mines and taking advantage of the country's transportation and transit opportunities.

As mentioned above, the distance and flow of cargo transportation are observed on the railway routes of Tajn, Mashhad, Bafiq, Bandar Abbas, Torbat-e-Haidriya, Khaf, Sangan and Herat. With the completion of this rail network in Afghanistan towards China and its completion on the route of Kerman, Zahedan, Bam, Fahrej to Chabahar, the ground for development and progress of the east and southeast of the country will be provided more than before. (Ebrahimbay salami, 2003, 2004)

Plan to facilitate transportation from Iran's eastern borders

After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, in the United States and the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the importance of facilitating the transit of goods and transportation to eastern countries, especially Afghanistan, became more apparent than ever before, and for this important matter, the need for infrastructure development, especially the construction and improvement of roads, became necessary.

The provinces of Khorasan and Sistan and Baluchestan, which share a long border with Afghanistan, did not have adequate infrastructure indicators. During the review of the 2002 budget bill, this matter was discussed in the Planning Commission, the Economic Committee, and the Program and Budget Coordinating Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. At the suggestion of the author of this article, a "Plan to Facilitate Transportation from the Eastern Borders of the Country" was proposed with an initial credit of 200 billion rials, and in clauses "f" and "s" of the commentary to Article 14 of the Law Budget 2002) and then continued and approved with the same amount of credit for each year until 2004.

With this plan, which is unique in its kind in terms of its special approach to urban development in eastern Iran, it provided the conditions for the construction and development of infrastructure and provided the initial credit for the construction of railway projects and the improvement of roads in eastern Iran.

The Torbat-Heidariyeh railway to Khaf and Herat and the beginning of the route of the railway network from west to east Afghanistan.

In 1996, during the process of finalizing the studies for the Mashhad-Bafaq railway, a proposal for a railway from Torbat Heydrieh to Khaf was presented to the President of the Republic. However, with the beginning of the implementation operations and the construction of the Mashhad-Bafaq railway, and considering the potential of the Sangan-Khaf iron ore mines in eastern Iran and also the proximity to the ancient and important city of Herat in Afghanistan, the plan for the Torbat Heydrieh-Sangan-Herat railway with a distance of 316 kilometers was resubmitted to the Iranian government by the author of this article in 2000. It was proposed and finally in 1380, despite the opposition of the government and its non-inclusion in the 2002 budget bill, this project was approved in the parliament with much effort and follow-up of [Approvals specialized commissions in rows, Budget bill 2002, 2001]

and the first phase of that project (Torbat Heydrieh-Sangan) was implemented within Iran at a distance of 146 kilometers and 170 kilometers in the second phase (Sangan-Herat) were prepared for implementation operations.

The distance of the project from Khaf station to Herat city is 191 kilometers. This distance will be implemented in four sections, the first and second sections inside Iran and the third section in Afghanistan, from where Iranian aid to Afghanistan is currently being delivered.

The construction of the fourth section from Roznak Ghoryan to the city of Herat is the responsibility of the Afghan government, but no effective steps have been taken to implement it so far.

Before this, the "International Aryan Railway" project had been proposed to connect Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indochina to Europe via Iran, which could also be called the "Europe-Asia Railway," and the aforementioned route was considered a suitable option for connecting South Central Asia to Southern Europe. Initial studies of the Arya International Railway were carried out by the French company Soufrail, based on a memorandum of understanding between the two governments of France and Afghanistan in 1975, for a distance of 1,800 kilometers from Herat to Kabul (Suff• 1975). The French company focused its studies only on Afghanistan's access to Europe and did not consider the country's access to the open waters of the Persian Gulf (as the Soviets were pursuing). Given the developments Geopolitics in the East and North of Iran and also the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf. The aforementioned plan was approved by the author of these lines in 2001 in Iran, in the Amran Commission and the Economic Committee of the Coordinating Commission of the Islamic Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and was entitled "Torbat Heydrieh, Sangan, Herat" in line number 40905268 in the 2002 Budget Law of Iran and was immediately implemented ([The Annual Budget Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2002, 2001).

In addition to the expansion of the international rail network, the implementation of this project will provide development, investment, and employment infrastructure in eastern Iran for the cities of Torbat, Heydrie, Khaf, and Rashtkhover, and in Afghanistan for the cities of Herat, Ghoryan, and Zandhojan. Given that Afghanistan is a landlocked country, its most urgent need for development is the creation of a railway network, and in the long term, given the increasing importance and power of China in terms of investment, production, and trade in the eastern territories, there will be dramatic changes.

The proposed designs of the Afghan railway sections and their distances to the European borders and the open waters and the Persian Gulf are presented in Table 2.

With the creation of a nationwide railway network within Afghanistan, Herat Station can act as a central and loading station and transport all goods and minerals, etc., by rail to Europe (Razi Station, Iran, on the Turkish border) and through Bandar Abbas (the Persian Gulf water border) and Chabahar (Indian Ocean), and provide access and transportation of goods from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China to the open waters of the world. Some of the functions of the Torbat-Heidriya-Khaf-Herat railway project, which is the main axis of the geopolitical situation and creates an opportunity to achieve a geoeconomic position, are:

- Expanding infrastructure and investing in eastern Iran and Afghanistan.
- Facilitating the transportation of the international rail network between the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan and the possibility of connecting it to the countries of China, Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- Connecting Afghanistan to the North-South Railway and the open waters of the world in the Persian Gulf and Chabahar in the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean, and connecting the west of China to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.
- Connecting the railway networks of India and Pakistan to Iran and Europe.
- Expanding Iran's railway networks and increasing their economic viability, taking into account the high capacity of the Sangan iron ore mines.
- Expanding the international rail network according to European, Iranian and Chinese standards (width 1435 mm) in a large part of Asia.
- Improving the living standards of the people of eastern Iran and reducing drug trafficking and strengthening alternative crops in Afghanistan.
- Increasing the security coefficient and developing social security on both sides of the Iranian and Afghan borders and creating an opportunity for a transformation from a geopolitical situation to a socioeconomic situation.
- Increasing The possibility of investing in the mines of Iran and Afghanistan and their connection with each other and the development of iron smelting factories in Khorasan, Isfahan, Yazd and Bandar Abbas, etc.
- Creating an environment for investment and employment in Iran and Afghanistan and developing their production and trade.

DISCUSSION

1- Threats and Challenges to the Extension of the Khaf-Herat Railway to Kashgar, China

1-1 At the time of the proposal and approval of the Iran-Afghanistan Railway and its inclusion in the 2002 Budget Law under the title of “Torbat-Heydariyeh-Sangan-Herat Railway” by the Islamic Council of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, there was only 27.4 kilometers of Russian-standard railway (1520 mm wide) in Afghanistan, which was divided into multiple sections. The first Afghan railway was opened in 1982 with a length of 816 meters and a width of 1520 mm. On the bridge that crossed the Amu Darya River on the border of Uzbekistan (Soviet) for the purpose of connecting the Bukhara-Dushanbe railway near the Termez and Hairtan regions, it came into operation.

15 kilometers of the railway is in the Hyderabad region, located on the southern shore of the Amu Darya, and 9.6 kilometers with a width of 1520 millimeters connects the Kushka region in Turkmenistan to the Turgandi region.

The purpose of the construction of these lines was to transport oil, gas and mineral resources to the Soviet Union over a small area. However, following the presentation of the plan by Iran and The Russian government felt the start of the project towards Herat because with the entry of the European rail network and the standard (German-French) railway through Iran to Afghanistan, whose width is 1435 millimeters, and China also has the same standard in the Afghan railway, from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view, the least historical loss so far is that Iran's other rail connection is to railway networks, practically connecting the East and West of the world, and different standards and regulations from The Russian railway line, which is 1520 millimeters wide, will only extend to the borders of Central Asian countries.

In other words, with the implementation and continuation of the dreaded Herat railway line, the Russian railway will stop at the borders of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the idea of accessing the open waters of the world with the Russian line will not be possible, and at least it will require replacing the bogie and adapting to the standards of Iran and China. Russian overt and covert reports and strategic studies showed that the Russians took maximum advantage of the delay in implementing the Iranian plan and the introduction of standard railway networks into Afghanistan and extended their railway line as far as possible into Afghanistan in order to maintain their strategic and economic influence beyond the countries of Central Asia. For this reason, the Russian railway from Zhetan on the Uzbek border to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, a distance of 80 kilometers, Kilometers were designed and quickly implemented. The Middle East Railways Regional Office of Afghanistan Railways (ARA) has written in its official report the technical, distance and strategic dimensions of this route as follows: "Technical-economic studies of the Heertan-Mazar-e-Sharif railway line began in 2009 and the route of the railway line from the Bandar-e-Hiretan Friendship Bridge located on the Afghan-Uzbek border to Nayibabad and Mazar-e-Sharif airport with a length of 75 kilometers (main line) and 6.36 kilometers (sub-main line) The Loopline was cut off. The construction of this 75-kilometer line by the Uzbekistan Railways Company and financed by the Islamic Development Bank began in 2010 and was completed at the end of the same year. Along with the construction of this line, the Khirtan station was also rebuilt and equipped with modern technologies. Hairan is a dry port and river port in Afghanistan, from where about 50% of trade and transit goods enter Afghanistan. The Hairan-Mazar-e-Sharif line has been in operation since 2011 and is currently the only active railway line in the country. This single-track line is built with a Russian gauge of 1520 millimeters and connects the northern province of Balkh to Uzbekistan via Herat and carries the bulk of Uzbekistan's trade with Afghanistan. The project is part of a larger project that will connect Herat to the west and then Iran, Tajikistan to the east, and Pakistan to the south. "This route was studied and implemented by the Uzbek government in 2009, eight years after it was approved by the Iranian parliament (in 2001), and was completed in less than a year in 2010. It was prepared for use and its cost was also provided by the Islamic Development Bank and it will most likely reach Herat in the future, a matter that was also emphasized by the Uzbek government at the Mazar-e-Sharif International Exhibition in July of this year (2019). The writer of this article, accompanied by a delegation from the Khorasan Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines, visited the President of Gholam Hossein Shafi, who is now the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture of Iran, in 2010. The utilization of this line and the great capacities created in this region were visited, and a report was

sent to the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a number of ministers and high-ranking officials of Iran and Afghanistan. The author of the speech to the President of the Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, stated that "Considering the above strategic importance of the issue of damage to Iran's national and international interests resulting from the delay and suspension of the Khaf-Herat railway and the lack of attention to the Afghan railway system in terms of Geopolitical and geostrategic, the least historical damage so far is that Iran's direct rail connection with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is no longer possible, and Iran has been limited to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan. If this neglect continues, soon the territory of Iran's railway system will be limited to Herat province, and the depth of the disaster will be greater than what happened to Iran in the defeat of Abbas Mirza during the Qajar era, which led to the collapse of Eastern civilization, poverty and backwardness, and a 150-year deadlock for eastern Iran." (Salami Ebrahimbay, 2011).

What is certain is that if the Russian railway line is extended to Herat and Kabul, the Afghan railway system will become subordinate to the Central Asian countries, and large parts of this country will be deprived of the possibility of connecting with Iran, Europe, and China through the international railway network. Due to technical problems, Afghanistan will also suffer a lot of losses in the long term, and this country will become a scorched earth in terms of international economic structure. The possibility of trans-regional investments in this country will decrease.

This has been mentioned in frequent reports to the then President of Afghanistan (Hamid Karzai), the Minister of Economy and Finance, the Minister of Public Works, and the Governor of Balkh Province, by providing expert opinions and determining various maps.

-1-2 In addition to Iran and the Central Asian countries, Pakistan, neighboring Afghanistan, has railway lines whose width is 1676 millimeters and its closest station to Afghanistan is Spin Boldak, 102 kilometers away. Another serious threat to the Khaf-Herat railway is that the Pakistani government will seize the opportunity to build a railway line with the standards of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, i.e., a 1,676 mm gauge rail from Quetta to Kandahar. Attention to China's activities and efforts to access the Gwadar port and proposals for large investments in this region is also noteworthy in this regard.

Pakistan has always considered the development of southern Iranian ports, especially Chabahar, as its competitor in the open waters, and the transfer of goods from the Kandahar-Quetta-Karachi and Gwadar routes would weaken the position of Herat and significantly reduce the economic and international interaction between Iran and Afghanistan. The report of the Middle East Railways Regional Office (2009) of the Afghan Railways on projects under study and construction on the Pakistani borders is as follows: "Two 1,676 mm gauge tracks from the Pakistani railway lines will reach the Torkham border. In 2010, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to establish new routes between the two countries.

The planned railway line from Torkham to Jalalabad and from there to Kabul is supposed to connect Pakistan to Turkmenistan through other planned railway lines in Afghanistan. Also, later, the Torkham to Kabul line can connect the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad, to the north of Iran (Torbat-e-

Haydariyah) by completing the east-west line of Afghanistan and building the Kabul-Herat railway line.

It should be noted that after the Ordibehesht Revolution in Afghanistan, Pakistan has practically had more influence than Iran in the affairs and issues of Afghanistan. In any case, paying attention to the diversity of international rail gauges between countries from an international economic and political perspective in the West-East Corridor is of utmost importance, which needs to be considered with a view to the economic future of West Asian countries [Khojastehnia, 2014].

2. Prospects for connecting the West-Eastern Railway of Iran to China in

Continuation of the Khaf-Herat Railway

In the opinion of most experts, the concept of the Silk Road and the civilization founded on it begins in China and extends to the borders of Europe. Economic developments and revolution in China The increase in the volume of investments and industrial and commercial activities of this country in the last three decades has been explained in such a way that today any production and trade in the world seems impossible without looking at the capacity and potential of China.

The consumer market for one and a half billion people and the possibility of cheap production in this country are the basis of many national and international economic calculations of the countries of the world. This has caused trade and production relations and communications with China to gain extraordinary importance.

The possibility of connecting the West-East Railway of Iran to China via Afghanistan, centered on the city of Herat, is one of the strategic and important geostrategic and geoeconomic issues of the West Asian region and the countries of Central Asia. For this reason, the author of these lines, when presenting the plans and maps of the Torbat-Heydariyeh, Khaf and Sangan-Herat Railway to the President and Government of Afghanistan in Kabul (2003), suggested that it would be better to define and request any assistance from China to Afghanistan in the form of building a network and connecting the China-Afghanistan Railway and its extension to Herat, so that the interests of everyone, including Afghanistan, China, Iran and even Europe, are ensured in this route. After this proposal and its reflection in the Afghan and Iranian media, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Tehran requested a plan, and the importance of this work was explained to them in several meetings. Subsequently, the Economic Counselor of the Chinese Embassy, along with the Embassy's Special Representative, attended the "First International Conference on the Development and Construction of Khaf County" (December 2003), which was organized by the Amir Kabir Jahan Research Institute and with the message of the then President Sayyed Mohammad Khatami by the Governor of Khorasan and the participation of guests from France and Afghanistan, in order to realize the idea of a railway network from Paris to Khaf and Beijing and to place it in international programs.(Kabir Amir,Jahan Research Institute, 2003)

3. Technical feasibility of connecting the Khaf-Herat railway to Kashgar, China

The possibility of connecting the Khaf-Herat railway to China has been studied and considered from a technical and geopolitical perspective, and a summary report is presented using expert opinions and various sources and documents (Naserian, 2014).

In the western and southwestern parts of the vast country of China, there are two railway lines running east-west, one of which is an old and active route from the city of Urumqi to the border point of "Drozba" on the border of Kazakhstan. This railway reaches Europe after passing through Kazakhstan and Russia. This route is an important and busy international line. The new route in southwestern China ends from the city of Urumqi to the city of Kashgar and has been constructed in recent years, and its extension towards Iran is the focus of the present study.

With the creation of a new railway corridor between Iran and China from Khaf to Kashgar (through Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), the railway distance and access of China and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Iran, Europe and the Persian Gulf will be reduced by about a thousand kilometers.

The Herat to Kashgar corridor is determined by the topographic location of western and southwestern China. This part is limited to the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayan Mountain range (borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), which makes the construction of railway routes very difficult and impossible in some areas due to the impassability of these areas.

4. Herat to Kashgar Corridor

The Herat to Kashgar Corridor is the missing link in the railway with international European standards and the most important uncompleted route of the Eastern Railway in the world, which needs to be put on the agenda of the governments of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China with high priority.

After the construction of the Khaf to Herat railway, the Herat to Kashgar route becomes more important for completing the West to East railway.

In recent years, China has extended its railway from Urumqi to Kashgar, and depending on the policies and strategic decisions of the countries along the route and Iran's support, we can hope for the construction of this extremely important corridor.

Connecting the Herat to Mazar-e-Sharif railway is the main axis connecting Europe and Iran to Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries through Afghanistan. Herat can be connected to Mazar-e-Sharif via two routes. One is the northern and mountainous route towards Badghis, Faryab, Jawzjan, Qaisar and Balkh, which is emphasized due to the short distance in the Herat-Kashgar corridor and is shown in Figure 2 on the Khaf-Kashgar route.

The other route is the crescent route that reaches Kabul from the southeast, passing through Shindand, Farah, Del-Aram, Lashgargah, Kandahar and Ghazni, and from Kabul goes to Pul-e-Khumri, Sherkhan Bandar and Mazar-e-Sharif.

This is the same plan that was proposed by the Sof Rail Company based on the creation and expansion of a larger rail network in Afghanistan and avoiding a direct and shorter Soviet connection to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf, and at that time, the rail connection of Europe to China was not an international priority.

The route from Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan to the Hairatan region on the border with Uzbekistan is now connected by 80 km of Russian rail. However, if the railway is based on European standards, this possibility can be continued by extending the railway from the city of Sherkhan Bandar and from there to the cities of Qarvan Tepe, Dangara and Dushanbe in Tajikistan, and from Dushanbe to the city of Sary Tash in Kyrgyzstan and from there to Kashgar in China.

The cities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, like other cities in Central Asian countries, have railways with Russian standards, and in order to connect international standard lines between Europe, Iran, Afghanistan and China, the agreement and cooperation of these countries and the determination of the government of the People's Republic of China to build and complete this network with European and Iranian railways are necessary and essential.

The Middle East Railway Regional Office of the Afghan Railways has reported some feasibility studies in northern Afghanistan under the title of the Aqina-Andkhoy-Mazar-e Sharif-Kunduz-Bandar Sheberghan railway as follows:

"In 2013, agreements were signed between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to establish a multinational railway in northern Afghanistan, which, with subsequent additions, will connect the country to the Caspian Sea.

This railway, which is about 400 kilometers long, will start from the Ata Murad region of Turkmenistan and will connect to Hairatan and Tajikistan from the border of Aqina, Andkhoy and through the provinces of Faryab and Kunduz in Afghanistan. 85 kilometers of this railway will be built in Turkmenistan and more than 300 kilometers in the northern provinces of Afghanistan. This railway will connect Afghanistan to Tajikistan through the port of Sheberghan in Kunduz province.

With the construction of this railway line, Afghanistan will be connected to the international railway network through its northern corridor, which will start from the Iran-Herat line and continue to Turkmenistan. Also, with its completion, Turkmenistan will be connected to Tajikistan through Afghanistan. The construction of this railway line is currently under feasibility studies. The mentioned office has reported all Afghan railway projects in two groups: high-priority projects and medium-priority lines, as shown in Table 3. An overview of the proposed and currently implemented Afghan railways maps for 2030 is shown in Figure 3.

5. Strategic Importance and Functions of the Herat-Kashgar Railway with European Rail

The construction of a railway in this corridor will provide Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China with access to the open waters of the Persian Gulf and southern Iran by connecting Bandar Abbas, Chabahar, Bushehr and Bandar Imam Khomeini.

In dry areas, the railway network will also provide access to the Caucasus region from the Astara and Julfa borders, to Turkey through the Razi border, and to Iraq through Shalamcheh and Khosravi, and will provide a connection to the Mediterranean Sea through Turkey, Iraq and Syria (Figure 1).

It will be possible to reduce the cost and time of mutual transfer of goods from China to countries in the West Asian region and Europe. Reducing the risk of crossing and reducing the frequency of goods crossing border points is possible by eliminating the route through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

It is worth noting that some of these countries have been the main obstacles to the passage of Iranian goods to Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries in the last two decades. The possibility of greater economic, social and cultural convergence in the Iranian cultural sphere, especially between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Iran and their greater connection with Europe and China is possible. The possibility of greater access of Iran and China to energy resources, mines and markets of these regions and also investment in them will increase. (Naserian, 2008)

The reliance of Iran and China on sea routes, which are sometimes imposed by restrictive military control by some countries even in the use of large ships, will decrease and the effect of such restrictions is clearly observed during the sanctions on Iran by the European Union and the United States. Further development of the western provinces of China, especially the important province of Xinjiang, will be achieved.

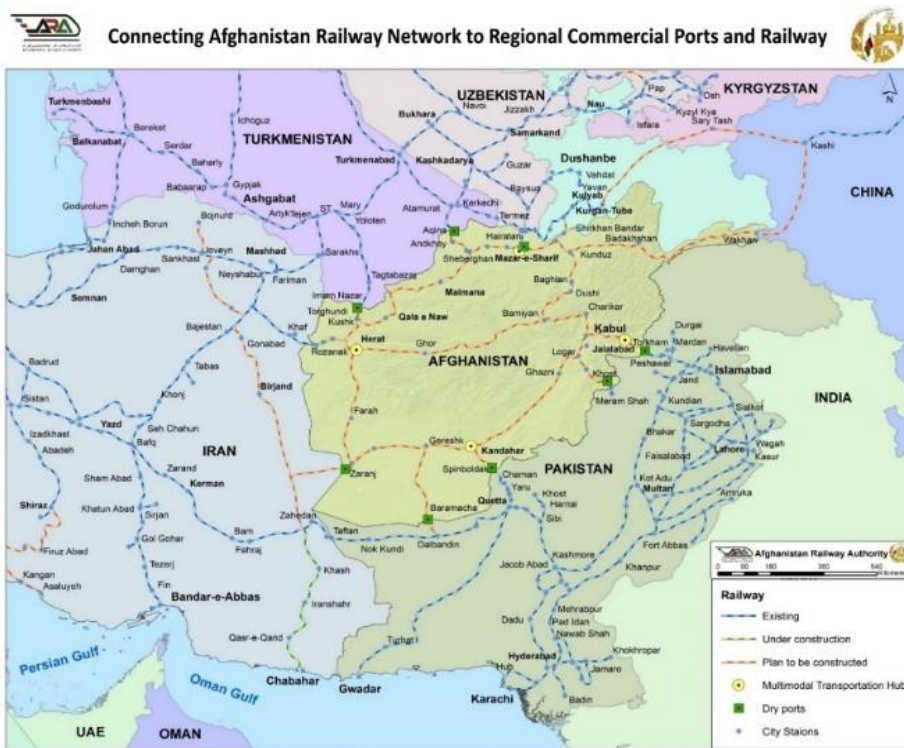


Figure 2. Trade routes and railways in the region (Iran to China) [Recca, 2019]

<i>Line Route</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Construction</i>
High priority projects		
Roznak (Ghorian)-Herat	65 km	--
Mazar-Sheberghan	220 km	Designed
Chaman-Spinbaldak	106 km	Designed
Bandar Sharkhan-Kunduz-Mazar	219 km	Designed
Herat-Andkhoy	550 km	-
Bamyan-Kabul-Logar-Delaram-Zaranj	1350 km	-
Torghandi-Herat	124 km	-
Medium priority lines		
Bamyan-Kunduz	230 km	-
Jalalabad-Kabul	120 km	-
Bamyan-Herat	580 km	-
Torkham-Jalalabad	75 km	-
Delaram-Farah-Herat	275 km	-

More transit benefits will arise for all countries in the region, especially with regard to the active and extensive economy of China and Europe. Social, international and development security and the settlement of cities along the route will be developed in these regions. The possibility of breaking free from the monopoly of Pakistan and Central Asia will become more and more available to the countries of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan can also connect to this rail route from the Termez border and benefit from all the benefits of this rail network [Construction and Development Company for Transportation Infrastructure of Iran, 2008] Turkmenistan can also connect its railway from the Turgandi border in northern Afghanistan to Herat and benefit from all the benefits of this route. Facilitating rail connectivity between Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan is possible. The current Tajikistan-Afghanistan railway now passes through the entry route into Uzbekistan, and to eliminate the need to pass through Uzbekistan and connect to this international network, it is necessary to build a 60-kilometer rail route inside Tajikistan (Figure 2). Investigating proposed routes, including the possibility of connecting from the Wakhan region of Afghanistan to China, which was part of the ancient Silk Road route given to China by the US government, and examining other possible routes to connect Herat to Kashgar, China, with topographic studies should be considered. (Nameless, 2008)

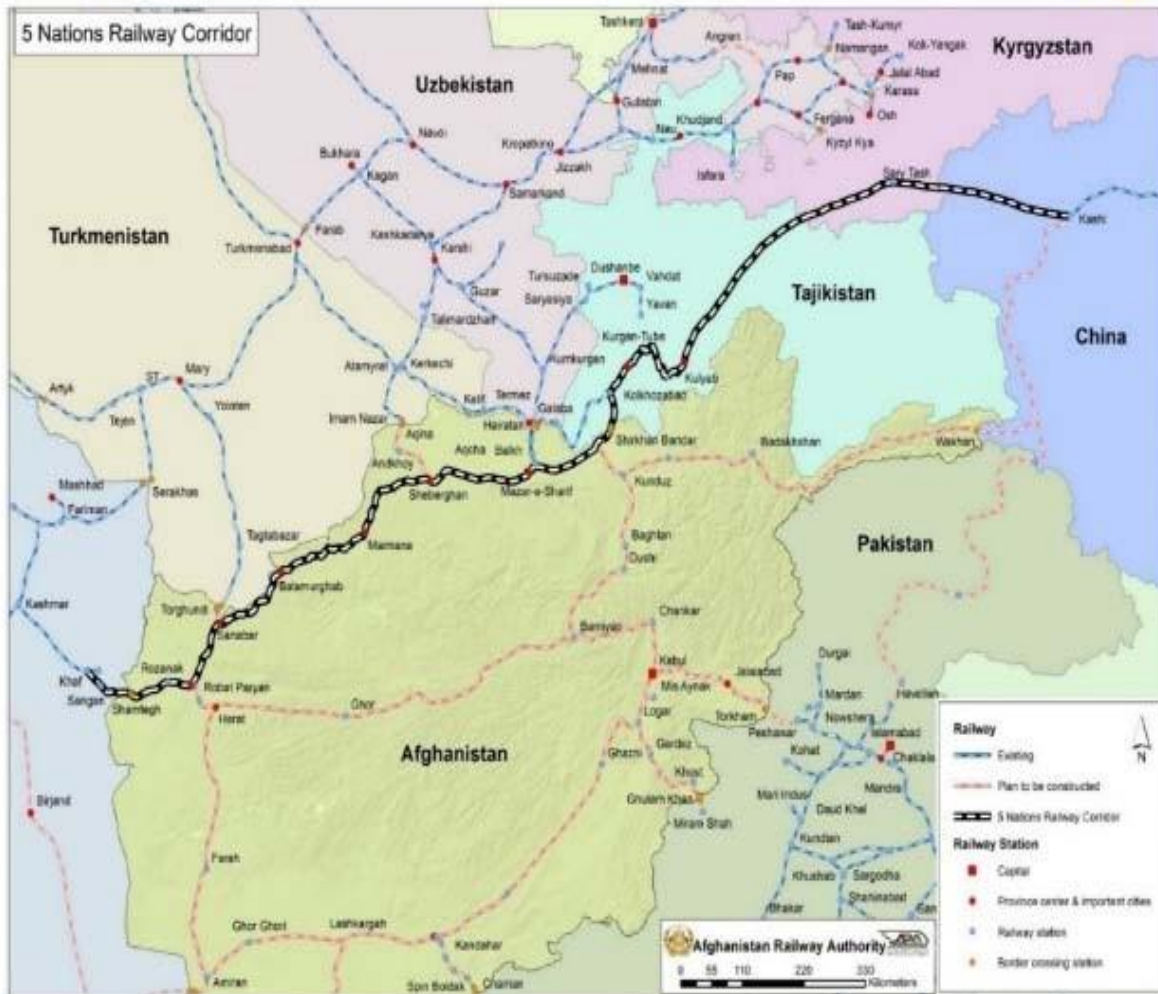


Figure 3. Routes of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway

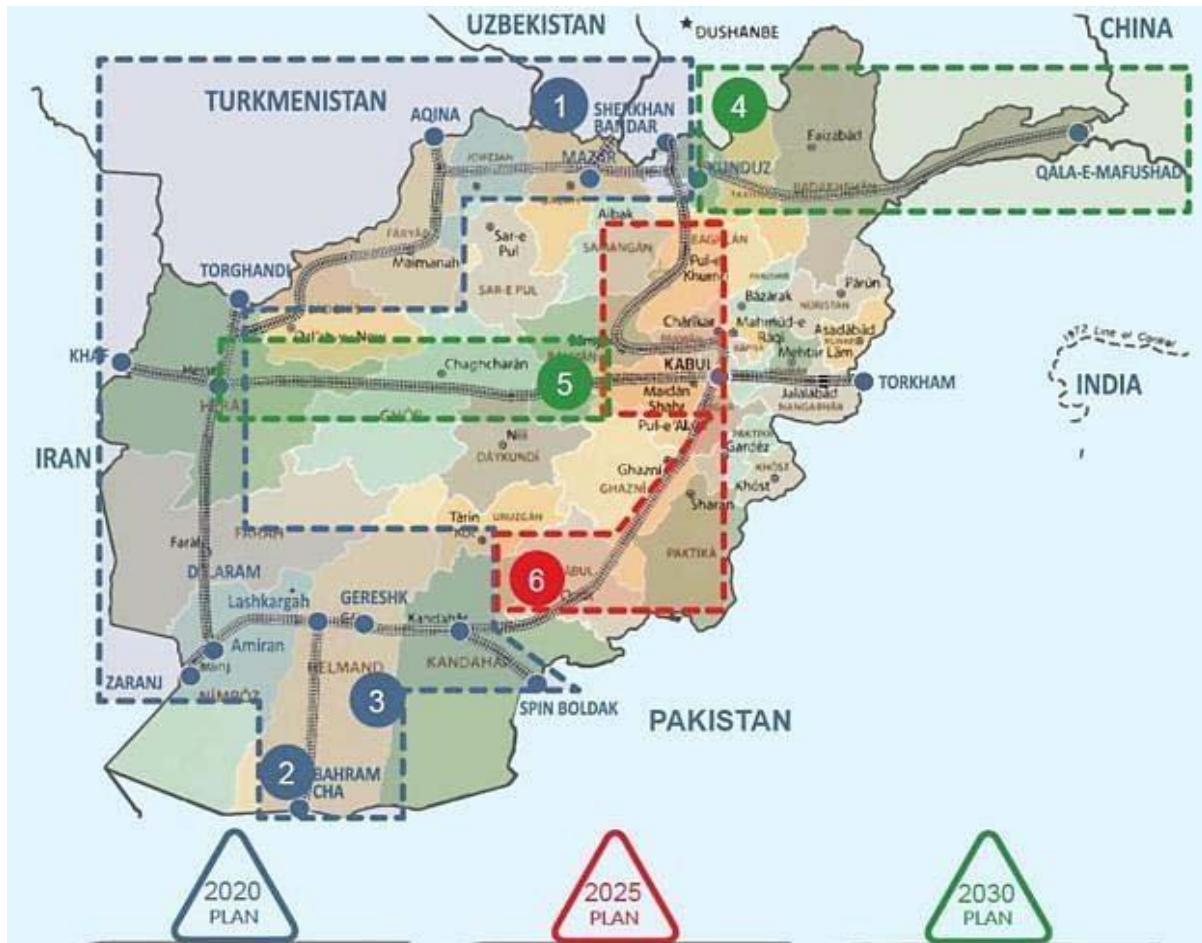


Figure 4. Overview of the Afghan government's proposed and ongoing plans for railway construction by 2020

CONCLUSION

If the policy-making and planning of governments, especially the Iranian government, is based on national and international strategic issues, the revival of the Silk Road and the realization of a modern Eastern civilization in the era of communications and globalization will be possible and feasible.

Just as the first phase of the West-East Iran Railway Project from Torbat Heydariyeh to Sangan, covering a distance of 145 kilometers, was implemented and put into operation in less than three years from the start, the possibility of implementing, completing, and carrying out the second phase of this project will be realized if the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran prioritizes this important matter in policy-making. The implementation of the Sangan-Khaf-Herat railway project will transform social interaction, economic exchange, and the trade balance of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and will bring development and prosperity to the people of the eastern regions of Iran and other countries in the region.

Connecting Afghanistan's railways to China, especially if it is carried out with a European-Iranian standard railway line through the Herat-Kashgar corridor, will be significantly effective in the exchange

of goods and passengers from the East to the West of the world, and will save Afghanistan from the chaos caused by three different rail standards, and will deepen and expand the strategic depth of the three countries of Iran, Afghanistan, and China on the route to Asia and Europe. The main threat to this important international corridor is the Iranian government's delay in quickly completing the Khaf-Herat phase and delaying its operation up to the Herat city station.

On the other hand, Russia's strategy to expand railway lines according to Central Asian standards will further lag Afghanistan and historically limit interaction between Iran, China, and Europe, as well as Afghanistan. The possibility of expanding the Indian subcontinent's railway network through Pakistan is a major problem for Iran's nationwide network, especially the west-to-east lines and the north-to-southeast expansion, and the ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.

In any case, the rapid construction and implementation of the 80-kilometer Russian railway line from the Hairatan border to Mazar-e-Sharif has proven more than ever that great powers like Russia, which have suffered defeats and great pressure during numerous wars in Afghanistan, are in no way oblivious to their strategic and economic interests, and do not neglect the "difference and conflict in the width of the railway in the neighboring regions of Afghanistan" to advance their long-term and strategic goals, and at great expense strengthen and stabilize their national and regional interests. Now it is necessary for the governments of Iran and China to prioritize this important project in policymaking, planning, budget allocation and continuous monitoring, with the cooperation of the Afghan state, and to implement it with greater sensitivity, and to ensure their regional and international interests and those of neighboring countries by paying attention to this important and highly strategic matter.

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