

The Belt and Road Initiative Help Afghanistan Regain Its Glories in Silk Road

The community is different from European Union which is characterized by transfer of sovereignty and high-level institutionalization, but is based on respect for sovereignty of countries, uphold the principles of openness, equality and a step-by-step approach, and accommodate each others' comfort level, in order to achieve regional integration, lasting peace and development.

"2": Take Asian and European continents and their adjacent seas as the core, land and sea as the two wings, and plug two wings for the Asia "Garuda".

"3": Uphold the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, achieve the objective of High Quality, High Standard and High Level. The BRI was proposed but not led by China. The relationship of its participants is equal development partnership rather than donor and recipient. It is totally different from the Marshall Plan in nature.

"4": The BRI will directly benefit 4 billion people in Eurasia. Over 140 countries have announced the participation or support to the Initiative. These countries include not only developing countries such as Tajikistan, Nepal, Kenya, but also developed ones such as Italy, Germany and France. On April 9th, China and EU Leaders published the joint statement, and all agreed to seek greater synergy between the BRI and the EU development plans including the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, the Trans-European Transport Networks

"5": To promote policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds are the five major goals of the BRI.

"6": The BRI will focus on developing six economic corridors and six pathways. Six economic corridors include China-Central Asia-West Asia, new Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Indochina Peninsula, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridors. Six pathways means railway, highway, waterway, airway, pipeline, and information express way.

"7": The BRI mainly covers 7 plates: Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and North Africa, Russia and Europe, other areas. The BRI is open to all sharing similar goals. It mainly focuses on the Eurasian continent, yet is not limited to the area of the ancient Silk Road and Eurasian countries.

"8": Facilities connectivity, industrialization, exploration of energy sources, economic and trade cooperation, financial cooperation, cultural exchanges, eco-environment protection and maritime cooperation are 8 priority areas for implementing the BRI.

Why does China initiate the BRI? There are various speculations outside. Some say that this is China's geopolitical strategy to counter US "Asia-Pacific re-balance" strategy or "Indo-Pacific" strategy and promote its excessive capacity.

In fact, all those concerns are unnecessary. The BRI is neither a "Trap", nor a "Tip" or "Tactics". It's a "Team work" and also indeed a "Test" to the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

There are at least four reasons for China's proposal of the BRI:

First, in order to realize more balanced, comprehensive and higher-quality development, China needs to develop its west, give full play to the advantages of West, change the situation that economic development heavily relies on the performance of eastern coastal cities, and promote land and marine development in a coordinated way and all-round opening up.

Second, under the backdrop of sluggish world economy and trade, and increased economic pressure in Asia, many research institutions have lowered their growth forecasts since the beginning of this year. At this time, it particularly requires effective investment, infrastructure financing, and supply-side reforms to stimulate economic growth.

Third, the "economic sunken" situation in the Asia inland and the hinterland of Central Asia should be changed. As we can see from the satellite photo taken at night, the brightly-lit places, that is the economically developed cities, are mostly located in the coastal areas of Eurasia, which is subject to both economic rules and colonialism. Now we should work to make every corners of Eurasia developed and Central Asia become the new growth engine.

The international economic authority had a data analysis indicating that the center of the world economy was near Afghanistan around AD 1600, thereafter gradually shifted westward to the Atlantic Ocean, and turned back to the east around 1950 when People's Republic of China was founded and King Zahir Shah was in power, is now accelerating the shift to the east and approaching Afghanistan soon. "Chance favors only the prepared mind", I hope, we can jointly grasp this historical trend.

Fourth, the world now really needs multilateralism, free trade, and great power responsibilities as well as direction, confidence, and certainty. It's really necessary to eliminate terrorism and extremism from the source. That is a lasting and dignified peace, reducing poverty and increasing employment. These are urgent needs of Afghanistan, and it is precisely the initial intention of the BRI.

In the past five years since the launch of the BRI, the volume of trade in goods

between China and the relevant countries has exceeded 5 trillion US dollars, with an annual growth rate of 1.1% against the backdrop of world trade decline and negative growth. Chinese direct investments in those countries have exceeded 70 billion dollars, with an annual growth of 7.2%. The 82 economic and trade cooperation zones, constructed by China all over the world, have paid over 2 billion US dollars in taxes and fees to the host countries and created more than 300,000 local jobs.

Let me give you a few examples of neighboring countries that are familiar to Afghan friends:

First, benefiting from the BRI, with the help of the Chinese government and enterprises, Tajikistan has achieved the unification of the national road network and the power grid. The road, tunnel, railway and natural gas pipeline projects undertaken by the Chinese side either successfully completed or rapidly pushing forward. The Dushanbe No.2 thermal power station aided by the Chinese government has met the needs of more than 700,000 residents in the capital Dushanbe and surrounding areas for winter power supply and heating. The bilateral trade volume between China and Tajikistan increased from 2.75 million U.S. dollars in 1992 to 1.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2018. At present, there are more than 400 Chinese-funded enterprises investing in Tajikistan, becoming the largest taxpayer in Tajikistan.

China and Tajikistan signed a local currency swap agreement totaling 3 billion yuan. The RMB loan and trade settlement business of the two countries steadily advanced, and the AIIB actively supported the financing of the project within Tajikistan. Two sides are also exploring the possibility of establishing a joint investment fund.

Second, benefiting from the BRI, Kazakhstan, the world's largest inland country, has found the Pacific Ocean estuary in Lianyungang Port of China. The logistics cooperation base built by China and Kazakhstan has become the platform of cross-border transport and warehousing logistics of many Central Asia countries.

Third, on April 8th, the first new railway was opened to traffic after the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948. This is also the early harvest of the BRI in Sri Lanka.

What kind of benefits can Afghanistan get from the BRI construction? This is the most concerned issue of all walks of life of Afghanistan.

To put it simple, for Afghanistan, a landlocked country at the heart of the Eurasian continent, the BRI offers not only roads in all directions but also unprecedented attention and investment by the international community on its development.

According to the latest research by international organizations such as the World Bank, the jointly building of the BRI will promote the global economic growth rate by at least 0.1%, cut the global trade cost and transportation time by 2.2% and 2.5%, and reduce the trade cost in the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor adjacent to Afghanistan by 10.2%.

From an economic point of view, Afghanistan's participation in the BRI can take advantage of its own geography, resources, demographic structure, connections and international attention, and avoid a lack of funds, industrial base and coastal ports. It gives Afghanistan the most convenient and cost-effective way to connect the world's emerging markets and the largest market, reduce the threshold and cost; It links Afghanistan's major cities, key enterprises to transportation lines which will form an agglomeration effect, from one point to the whole region, forming a platform for economic take-off; It will simultaneously stimulate Afghan investment, consumption and exports, simultaneously explore domestic and international markets, and strive to create jobs, and help Afghanistan get rid of the current passive situation that the "three wagons pull the economics" can't move forward and restrain each other.

Afghanistan was among the first explicitly supported the BRI, signed the relevant memorandum of understanding and established relevant security cooperation mechanism with China. The Chinese side attaches importance to and appreciates the positive attitude of Afghan leaders, government departments and people from all walks of life and regards Afghanistan as an important partner in BRI and for early harvest.

Afghanistan's active participation in the joint construction of the BRI has already and will continue benefit Afghanistan in six aspects, which can be summed up as six "promoting".

First, promoting trade. In just 4 months Afghanistan has exported more than 15 million US dollar pine nuts to China through 64 cargo flights after launching the program "Chartered cargo flight for Afghan pine nuts exporting to China" in last November. Although the global trade declined last year, China-Afghanistan goods trade volume maintained the 1.1 billion US dollars, and Afghan carpets, marble and saffron are all selling very well in China.

Second, promoting Chinese investment in Afghanistan. Although the security situation in Afghanistan is not good, China still invested some projects with nearly US \$500 million accumulative investment in Afghanistan. Recently, a Chinese private company invested in Bamyan province to help the local people grow and sell saffron. Dozens of families benefited directly.

Third, promoting education opportunities. Afghanistan is an important partner to China on the joint construction of BRI. To this end, China provides more than 150 scholarships and about 1000 training opportunities to Afghan every year, which is very helpful to youth and professionals in Afghanistan. Last year, protocol staff from the Palace and Mofa of Afghanistan were trained at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in China. Right this moment, a senior officials delegation of Afghan MOFA is visiting Henan province of China. Due to the BRI, the three-party cooperation related to Afghanistan is increasing, which is conducive to the complementary advantages of all parties and the cooperation of major powers in Afghanistan. China and India are discussing to provide training for the Afghan police officers. China and the United States are also discussing to help Afghanistan improve the education supervision system.

Fourth, promoting the sense of security of the Afghan people. China's economic and trade cooperation with Afghanistan and all kinds of donation to Afghanistan have increased employment, helped Afghanistan in poverty alleviation, and are conducive to eradicating the social soil of terrorism and extremism. The security cooperation between China and Afghanistan under the BRI has also protected the people and struck the evils.

Fifth, promoting Afghanistan's international visibility and cultural influence. 1300 years ago, Chinese great monk Xuanzang went to India for studying Buddhism through Afghanistan. He paid tribute to the giant Bamyan Buddha, and made the only authoritative record of the Buddha in the world. Nowadays, because of the BRI, the study of Gandhara civilization and the Bamyan Buddha has become a prominent school in China. Chinese archaeologists have come to Afghanistan, and Afghan treasures and scholars have also visited Dunhuang. Buddhist relics from Mes Aynak are expected to be exhibited on the Asian Civilization Exhibition which will be held at the same time as the BRI summit.

Sixth, promoting Afghanistan's international access and diplomatic options, this is crucial for Afghanistan and other landlocked countries.

The Chinese and our Afghan friends have both heard of the proverb: it takes two hands to clap. Early harvests in BRI will required concerted efforts from China and Afghanistan, including efforts by the Afghan side to give better play to the role of Afghan business people and chamber of commerce in China in promoting Afghan products and brands, supporting Chinese language programs and train more professional 'matchmakers' for China-Afghanistan economic and trade cooperation. As a man sows, so he shall reap. So long as the Afghan side earnestly engages itself in the BRI, it will for sure happily benefit from it.

While advancing the BRI, the Chinese side attaches equal importance, treats as equals and engages with equal enthusiasm to all participating countries. We are all members of the same band and every one of us is important and indispensable.

Based on cost accounting, infrastructure conditions and trade practices, Afghanistan is currently promoting air cargo corridors, it is good, but can only be supplementary to land and sea transportation. The importance of Karachi Port to Afghanistan's foreign trade is unlikely to be reduced in the short term. Of course, the future of Gwadar Port is also an attractive choice. This is exactly the significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan.

As we cannot choose our neighbors, good-neighborliness and friendship are invaluable. The Chinese side sincerely hopes that Afghanistan and Pakistan will increase mutual trust and improve relations. The trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue successfully held in December last year expressed the desire to jointly advance the BRI, develop virtuous interactions between Afghanistan and Pakistan and promote connectivity between the two countries and others in the region. At present, the three government are studying the feasibility of enhance the connectivity of Afghanistan and Pakistan through railway and highway.

Afghanistan is located between the China-Central Asia-West Asia economic corridor and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). If relations with neighbors in the north and south are improved and trade is better facilitated, Afghanistan's position in the BRI will be further consolidated, with its geographic comparative advantage and pivotal position on the regional value chain more prominent. If the security situation improved, the infrastructure upgraded, and the business environment improved, I believe that Afghanistan will attract more international investors including Chinese. The biggest challenge at the moment is security.

There is a common proverb in China and Afghanistan, "One flower does not make a spring", the BRI and regional economic cooperation is dedicated to make a spring full of the beauty of all flowers. Today it is the high-speed railway instead of the camels that lead the fast advancement of the BRI. In the words of Chairman Mao Zedong, "ten thousand years are too long, seize the day, and seize the hour." It is hoped that together we will seize the current opportunity for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and jointly advance the BRI so that the Afghan people will bathe in the sunshine of peace and development at an early date!

(1) Taliban Offensive...

in response to the Afghan government's security plan is "baseless".

The statement clarifies that the Afghan government has not announced operations but it has removed all the barriers on the way of peace. The statement says that by announcing offensives, the Taliban has often targeted "innocent people in Afghanistan" while they have been dictated by "strangers" and that they have used civilian houses as a shield.

"The people and government of Afghanistan call on those Taliban leaders and members who are against the offensive announcement to stand with the Afghans and raise their voice against this 'illegitimate' attempt," the statement said.

The statement says that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have been clearly directed to take their measures based on the principle of defending the country's sovereignty and honor.

"The Afghan government is ready to defend every corner of the country but it once again calls on the Taliban leadership to stop the illegitimate and imposed war and nod to the unconditional invitation of the Afghan government and people for peace talks," the statement concluded.

The Taliban announced their spring offensive on Friday morning which is entitled Operation Al-Fatah - which means "victory" in Arabic. The group said in a statement that the offensive will be conducted across Afghanistan with the aim of "eradicating occupation" and "cleansing our Muslim homeland from invasion and corruption".

"Our Jihadi obligation has not yet ended," the Taliban said. The Ministry of Defense in a statement said the offensive has been announced by the Quetta Shura, Taliban's leadership council, and that by making such an announcement, the group wants to give morale to its fighters after "facing many defeats". The ministry said the Afghan Defense and Security Forces will fight the Taliban and that the

offensive announcement is "propaganda".

President Ashraf Ghani on April 2 approved the security plan for the current solar year as conflicts are intensifying between security forces and Taliban in different parts of the country.

The National Security Council said in a statement that the plan, named Khalid Security Plan, is aimed at boosting security across the country particularly the security of urban areas and highways. (Tolo news)

(2) Nehan in Dubai to...

The event will be highlighted by the Ministry of Mines & Petroleum's exclusive announcement of a number of new mineral projects being offered for exploration and development, he said. He said that full-day session will provide attendees with detailed briefings on each of the new investment opportunities in the country. (Pajhwok)

(3) Foreign Militants...

However, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid rejected the presence of foreign fighters in their ranks. He also rejected their fighters had suffered casualties in Zazi Aryub district. (Pajhwok)

(4) Balkh Gets New...

a bachelor's degree from an England university and he has a Ph.D. in the military field from Turkey. He has served in intelligence and investigative departments of the Ministry of Interior, commander of Special Forces' 333 Unit and as commander of Special Forces' 222 Unit. What happened in Balkh in March?

Gen. Abdul Raqib Mubariz took office as the police chief of the northern Balkh province despite opposition by former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor back in March this year. Forces loyal to Atta Mohammad Noor resisted for almost the entire day against the appointment of the new police chief but Gen. Mubariz took office while surrounded by commando forces who were deployed to take the situation under control.

Addressing reporters after taking the office, Mubariz said he was appointed to the post on the order of President Ghani and that anyone who will adopt a hostile approach towards the system and government, will be retaliated with full force.

Meanwhile, Atta Mohammad Noor, the Chief Executive of Jamiat-Islami Afghanistan who also served as Balkh governor has said that the new appointment violates the agreement he had reached with President Ashraf Ghani last year. Noor called on the people in the province not to go to their works and shut their businesses in protest to the controversial appointment. But residents in Mazar-e-Sharif have expressed concerns over violence.

Reports, meanwhile, indicate that special units of Afghan National Police (ANP) were deployed in key areas of the province to avoid a possible security threat on eve of the appointment of the new commander.

Local officials in Balkh so far have not given further details about the issue. According to Munir Ahmad Farhad, a spokesman to Balkh governor, the discussion is underway between tribal elders, MPs, members of Balkh provincial council and government representative to resolve the issue. Some residents have said that security situation deteriorated in the province in recent months and that if the reshuffling lead to stability they will welcome such a move. This comes at a time that the 209 Shaheen Army Corps in a statement said that the army is on red alert to ensure security and safety of the people's life and property. (Tolo news)

(5) Taliban's Peace...

It also pertinent to mention, that the Taliban have launched their spring offensive code-named Al-Fatah on Friday. (Pajhwok)

(6) 27 Taliban Killed...

till late at night. Miakhel said the air force was ready to prevent civilian casualties in the area. Jalal Khan, a resident of the area, said the militants initially blew up two explosive-laden

trucks and then initiated a firefight. He did not provide details about casualties. Another security source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said most parts of the district building had been damaged as a result of the first bombing. On the other hand, the Taliban claimed killing several security forces in the assault, which came hours after the militants announced their spring offensive. (Pajhwok)

(7) Pak, Afghan...

remains endemic in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria. Afghan health officials say 28 polio cases surfaced in 2018 in the world, including 20 Afghanistan and eight in Pakistan. (Pajhwok)

(8) US Praises ICC's...

of the crimes were allegedly committed, the judges said, and there's a need for the ICC "to use its resources prioritizing activities that would have a better chance to succeed."

Some human rights advocates are slamming the decision as a dangerous precedent. "ICC judges' decision to reject an investigation in Afghanistan is a devastating blow for victims," Human Rights Watch's Param-Preet Singh said in a statement. "It sends a dangerous message to perpetrators that they can put themselves beyond the reach of the law just by being uncooperative."

U.S. officials have repeatedly denounced the probe. For example, White House National Security Adviser John Bolton said last September that "the United States will use any means necessary to protect our citizens and those of our allies from unjust prosecution by the illegitimate court." "We welcome this decision and reiterate our position that the United States holds American citizens to the highest legal and ethical standards," the White House said Friday. "Since the creation of the ICC, the United States has consistently declined to join the court because of its broad, unaccountable prosecutorial powers; the threat it poses to American national sovereignty; and other deficiencies that render it illegitimate."

Bensouda submitted more than 20,000 pages of information to the court. She said that the groups allegedly responsible for possible crimes are the Taliban and other armed groups, Afghan forces, and U.S. personnel.

As the decision notes, the prosecutor says "there is reasonable basis to believe that, since May 2003, members of the US armed forces and the CIA have committed the war crimes of torture and cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, and rape and other forms of sexual violence pursuant to a policy approved by US authorities." She also said that the Taliban and other armed groups have carried out "a widespread and systemic attack on civilians perceived as supporting the Afghan government and foreign entities," and that there is also "reasonable basis" to believe that war crimes have been committed against people detained by the Afghan National Security Forces. Some critics view the court's decision as a sign that it bowed to U.S. pressure. But the reality may be more complicated, as Harvard Law professor Alex Whiting wrote in a commentary on Just Security. "This decision will likely come to be seen as the beginning of a broader effort by the judges and the Prosecutor to orient the Court's very limited resources toward those investigations where there exists some meaningful prospect of success," Whiting wrote. "What is critical to this decision is that while the U.S. was the most vocal in its opposition to the Court's investigation, none of the potential targets were supportive of the Court's efforts." The ICC, which was established when the Rome Statute took effect in 2002, is charged with prosecuting crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. It has focused on African countries, which has been a source of criticism. Sima Samar, the chair of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, strongly supported the probe. "With this decision, people will lose hope of getting justice and they might take revenge, fueling conflict in the country," she told The Associated Press. (AP)