

Opportunities, Risks and Countermeasures of China's Investment in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Afghanistan is a strategic hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. The United States, Russia, India and other power countries are extremely concerned with Afghanistan. Although the United States will gradually withdraw, it will retain military bases in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is currently in a critical period of transition from war to peace. To deal with the chaos in Afghanistan in the era of withdrawal, China needs to layout in Afghanistan early. This can not only promote the stability of China's western region, but also help China and Central and Western Asian countries to promote cooperation under the framework of The Belt and Road Initiatives. The key to layout in Afghanistan is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has achieved remarkable results in Pakistan. China Investment and construction experiences in Pakistan will bring better economic benefits to Afghanistan and china.

Key words: China; The belt and road initiatives; Opportunity; Risk; Countermeasure;

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INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiatives conforms to the trend of the times, adapts to development and laws, conforms to the

interests of all peoples, and has broad prospects (Xi, 2018, p.300). Afghanistan, a country along the Belt and Road, is a strategic hub linking South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. After World War II, the Soviet Union, the United States, India and other major powers competed for power in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has become the field of great power. In recent years, with the gradual withdrawal of the United States, countries' policy towards Afghanistan will change. This will cause drastically change in the Afghanistan situation. Afghanistan is currently in a critical period of transition from war to peace. China as a neighboring country with afghan, China needs to layout in Afghanistan early in order to deal with the chaos in Afghanistan in the era of withdrawal. This can not only promote the stability of China's western region, but also help China and Central Asian and Western Asian countries to promote cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road. The key to the layout in Afghanistan is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China plays a vital role in many projects extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, and has achieved good economic and social benefits. There are few studies on China's participation in the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan.

Since President Musharraf proposed the concept of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in 2006, the research on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has gone through three stages. The first stage is from 2006 to 2012, mainly studies the expected benefits of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and various obstacles and difficulties that may be encountered. This stage of research mostly belongs to the feasibility study. The second stage is from 2013 to 2015 when China decided to build the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It mainly studies many factors affecting the construction and operation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and their solutions. This stage of research mostly belongs to countermeasures. The third stage is from 2016 to now, after the infrastructure,

namely, highway and energy projects are roughly completed, they are turned to the construction of industrial parks. At present, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has gone beyond the deep development of a country in Pakistan, and began to implement extensive development to neighboring countries and even Central and Western Asia. With the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan as a link, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and Silk Road Economic Belt are connected.

In 2019, the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project will enter a new stage and begin to extend to Afghanistan. In fact, as early as December 26, 2017, after state councilor and foreign minister Wang Yi proposed the idea of extending the China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, the domestic and foreign academic research on the economic and trade relations between China and Afghanistan was only limited to the analysis of China's commercial investment in Afghanistan, and did not involve the research on extending the China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan. For example, in June 2018, the Danish Institute of international studies published a report entitled *China's participation in Pakistan and Afghanistan*. (Andersen & Jiang, 2018) The report discussed the difficulties faced by China's economic investment and development in Afghanistan, but did not specifically examine the relationship between the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Afghanistan, nor did discuss the benefits brought to China by the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, as well as the difficulties and Countermeasures Faced by China.

As one part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor rarely studies its relationship with Afghanistan as a single individual. Afghanistan, as a transport hub in Central, South and West Asia, a country along the Central Pakistan Economic Corridor and a neighbor to Pakistan, is closely linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Therefore, it is particularly necessary and urgent to study the opportunities, risks and countermeasures of China's investment in Afghanistan.

1. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHINA TO INVEST IN AFGHANISTAN

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, is a landmark foreign economic policy of President Xi Jinping. Mr. Xi proposed in Kazakhstan in September 2015 to revive the ancient Silk Road as a way to connect China and Europe through trade and investment, but most importantly through infrastructure. The Belt and Road Initiative is first an economic policy initiative designed to help Chinese companies acquire strategic assets, including natural resources and technology, through

overseas projects and markets. As a foreign policy initiative, China hopes to establish closer economic ties through the Belt and Road initiative to strengthen diplomatic relations between China and countries along the route and to promote a multi-polar world order. China's investment in Afghanistan has good opportunities. As a neighbor of Afghanistan, China has strength and desire to participate in the investment and construction of Afghanistan. China's overseas investment and construction experience is successful. The origin of China and Afghanistan is embodied in commerce and culture.

1.1 Business Cooperation

In terms of business and trade cooperation, deepening business and investment cooperation, trade and investment cooperation should integrate international and domestic markets, two kinds of energy, two kinds of resources, two-way opening to achieve better interest cooperation (Xi, 2018, p.301). China's participation in the Sino-Pakistan Economic Corridor extends to Afghanistan's trade and investment cooperation, but also to carry out trade and investment cooperation to coordinate the international and domestic markets, two energy and two resources. Nearly 30 years ago, Chengdu-based Dongfang Electric Co., Ltd. built the only steam turbine power project in China-Pakistan cooperation at that time. With the continued expansion of cooperation between the two sides, the Consulate General of Pakistan in Chengdu officially opened on 19 April 2007. With the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative and the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Chengdu has closer ties with Pakistan. In April 2015, Chengdu and Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city, officially formed an international friend city, opening a new chapter for the implementation of the Belt and Road strategy (Shasha, 2015, April 22). On September 11, 2015, Sichuan Provincial Department of Commerce and China Branch of the National Development Bank jointly held a high-level seminar on financial cooperation in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. According to the head of China branch of the National Development Bank, China Development Bank is actively tracking Pakistan Railway Project, Karachi-Laheer Expressway Project and Guadal Port Development and other related projects, and increasing financial support for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project. It is recommended that Sichuan enterprises focus on the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The meeting was also attended by delegations from Pakistan, which brought a series of preferential policies for China. Assad Ali Shah, Principal Assistant to the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, said Pakistan was vigorously promoting the Special Economic Zone. Enterprises in the special zone need not pay any taxes during the 10 - year production period. Enterprises import machinery and equipment, raw materials and so on without paying any tariffs. In the

export processing zones, Chinese enterprises can export 80 % of their products back to China and only pay 1 % tax. Since then, Chinese enterprises have increased investment in Pakistan (Shasha, 2015, September 14). In October 2015, China Geology Group, a subsidiary of Sichuan Geology Group, took the construction project of LAWI hydropower station with a contract price of CNY 950 million in Pakistan. In addition, the group received a construction project in Pakistan in 2014, the cumulative amount of the two ' Belt and Road ' construction projects reached 1.72 billion yuan (Syed, 2020, April 01).

The fifth Sichuan-Pakistan Business Forum opened in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, on 19 March 2016. China's provincial government, enterprises, the media and other organizations to participate in the Sichuan Province International Cooperation and Investment Promotion Committee led by the Secretary-General and Executive President Wang Jian, organized dozens of business teams to Pakistan to participate in the forum. In addition, modern logistics port in western China, China Chuankai Industrial Group Co., Ltd., Chengdu Industrial and Commercial Union, Chengdu Overseas Chinese Office, Chengdu Construction Engineering Group Corporation, China Zhongling Heavy Steel Co., Ltd., Chengdu Guorong Technology Co., Ltd. and other units and enterprises also signed strategic cooperation agreements with Pakistani enterprises.

On February 6, 2017, the key control node project ' pressure diversion tunnel of KOTO hydropower station in Pakistan, Sichuan Geological Group, was successfully completed one year in advance. The EPC general contract project of Pakistan KOTO power station is one of the key foreign projects in the north of the country's Belt and Road construction plan. It is also the first hydropower station project of the group company in Pakistan. It is also the largest overseas project of Sichuan Geological Group to go out to realize the strategy of 10 billion mines. The project was formally contracted on 19 January 2015 and formally received the commencement consent of the German supervision company on 2 February. The success of its construction has great influence and far-reaching historical and practical significance on the national concept of promoting the common development of Asia-Pacific countries and regions, realizing common prosperity, enhancing understanding and trust, and strengthening all-round communication, and the national strategy of comprehensively promoting practical cooperation, building a community of interests, destiny and responsibility with political mutual trust, economic cooperation and cultural inclusion. At the same time, its successful completion will play an important role in establishing a good international image of the enterprise, showing the spirit of the enterprise, expanding social influence, entering the overseas construction market and standing firm, seeking new economic growth points, and promoting the harmonious development of the unit.

In 2019, Chang Hong first released full-screen TV in Pakistan. Chang Hong takes product going out, brand going out, capital going out as overseas development strategy, and actively promotes the process of layout globalization. In July 2011, Chang Hong established Chang Hong RUBA Company with the joint venture of RUBA Group, Pakistan's largest household appliance distributor, and established TV, refrigerator and air conditioning plants. At the same time, it had the production capacity of washing machines, small household appliances and other full-class household appliances. After nearly a decade of business development, Chang Hong TV, air conditioning, refrigerator in Pakistan has a broad market base, brand awareness and reputation gradually increased. China will always be an important partner in Pakistan's future Belt and Road construction and China-Pakistan economic corridor construction. China has made remarkable achievements in the construction of China-Pakistan economic corridor, and the extension of China-Pakistan economic construction to Afghanistan is also a new development opportunity.

Afghanistan was not initially included in the map of China's trillion-dollar BRI program when it was launched in 2013. Instead of Afghanistan, BRI plans focused on Pakistan and Central Asia. In recent years, however, Beijing has shifted focus and increased its stakes in Afghanistan, which sorely needs infrastructure development projects. Afghanistan's potential role in the BRI has been discussed in a report by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), a Kabul-based think tank. The report points potential roles for the war-battered country that fits well into the BRI. Strategically located Afghanistan provides the shortest route between Central Asia and South Asia, and between China and the Middle East; it can also serve as a gateway to the Arabian Sea. The \$60 billion CPEC program contains transportation infrastructure projects that can be extended to Afghanistan, thereby further integrating it into the BRI (Mariam & Bismillah, 2018, August).

China's economic investment is very attractive to Afghanistan. One of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies scholar Dr. Sayed Yahya Akhlaqi said: The Belt and Road Initiative is predicted to bring industrialization and investment to Afghanistan. This country needs reliable and cost-efficient source of power. The country has potential in hydro-electric power, which requires the construction of dams and related facilities. This is an area where China can provide financial and technical expertise under investment projects. This is because China has good engineering and technical expertise and has successfully completed many infrastructure projects. Mining is another attractive sector for investment. Chinese companies have ventured as far as Africa to mine for minerals and energy (Sayed, 2021, January 30). Second, by becoming a part BRI, Afghanistan will have the opportunity to stabilize its economy by enhancing its trade opportunities. In 2015,

over 70 percent of Afghanistan's total exports were to Pakistan and India alone, according to data from the UN Comtrade database. The main export goods were carpets, rugs, dried fruit, and medicinal plants, and not the copper, iron ore, and other valuable resources Afghanistan is known to possess in abundance. Accessing the wider BRI network 4 will thus provide two opportunities: first, access to markets in China, Central Asia, and parts of Europe that Afghanistan doesn't currently trade extensively with and second, the chance to diversify Afghan trade products by exporting copper, iron, and other resources to countries on the BRI (Sayed, 2021, January 30).

1.2 Cultural Aspect

General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that we should actively promote the Belt and Road international cooperation, and strive to achieve policy communication, equipment connectivity, trade unimpeded, financing, people-to-people communication, create a new platform for international cooperation, and add new impetus for common development (Xi, 2018, p.301). This is a political declaration and program of action that epitomizes the new chapter of the Belt and Road at a new historical starting point. The extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan is a new platform for international cooperation along the Belt and Road. Based on Pakistan's development experience, China's participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor extends to Afghanistan with profound experience. In terms of cultural relics and archaeology, Sichuan has strong strength in cultural relics and archaeology, including Sichuan Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Sichuan University School of History and Culture, Southwest University for Nationalities School of Tourism and History and Culture, XiHua Normal University School of History and Culture and other institutions.

On January 30, 2018, a high-level delegation from Afghanistan, led by the Director of the National Museum of Afghanistan, Mohammed Fassim Rahim, and the Director of the Afghan Historical Relics Office, Abdul Ahmad Abbashi, the Director of the Asian and European Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Yahia Muhcini, and the President of *The motherland newspaper*, Ahmed Zalmy Shahbaz, visited the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology said that it would comply with the national strategic plan of the Belt and Road Initiative, actively report and apply to higher-level units for more archaeological work, effectively enrich the cultural exchange connotation of the Belt and Road Initiative and promote the mutual understanding between China and the Arab people. Mohammed Fassim Rashim paid tribute to the achievements of Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, and put forward the hope that there will be opportunities for academic research

and in-depth exchanges in archaeological and historical research, cultural heritage protection and restoration, especially the hope that Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology can go to Afghanistan to carry out Buddhist heritage archaeological excavations (SICRA, 2018, February 06).

2. RISK OF CHINA'S INVESTMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative. It connects the Silk Road Economic Belt to the north and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to the south, which is the key hub connecting the North and the South. On September 7, 2019, Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, attended the third Sino-Arab Foreign Minister Dialogue and pointed out that the three parties are willing to strengthen connectivity and promote the extension of the Sino-Arab Economic Corridor project to Afghanistan.

Although the three parties have the will, the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan faces risks such as the US-Russia underworld war, the Indian-Pakistan struggle, ethnic conflicts, the presence of NATO coalition forces, and terrorist threats. Coupled with the limited authority of the Afghan Government, the impact of Afghan forces cannot be ignored. Evaluating the benefits and risks of China's participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project extends to Afghanistan not only helps to find countermeasures to deal with various risks, but also is of great significance to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative. Simultaneously, this move provides Beijing the necessary leverage with Afghanistan and its well-established partner Pakistan, to box in India and limit U.S. influence in South Asia. When combined with the existing digital Silk Road of Chinese fiber optics that connect much of the country, this is a good way for Afghanistan to strengthen connections with the BRI (Canyon & Sitaraman, 2020, February 21).

2.1 International Threats

The threat of the United States. China has been criticised for its commercial interest in hitchhiking under US security umbrella. In an influential speech on *New York Times* in 2009, Robert D. Kaplan questioned the situation in Afghanistan, saying that while the United States sacrificed its blood and money, China benefited from it. The U. S. military provided security protection for a Chinese state-owned enterprise to mine tens of billions of dollars of Anak Copper Mine (Kaplan, 2009, October 06). At the strategic level, Kaplan compares the United States with empires such as ancient Rome and the 19th century Britain, They find that themselves mighty familiar to empires like that of ancient Rome and 19th-century

Britain: struggling in a far-off corner of the world to exact revenge, to put down the fires of rebellion, and to restore civilized order. Meanwhile, other rising and resurgent powers wait patiently in the wings, free-riding on the public good we offer. This is exactly how an empire declines, by allowing others to take advantage of its own exertions (Kaplan, 2009, October 06).

The west remains ambivalent about strengthening china's military presence abroad: while china has been criticised for ignoring domestic human rights violations in some partner countries, its increased military presence abroad has upset western defence headquarters. Not only the United States, Russia uses Tajiks and Uzbeks to hinder China's projects, India uses local armed groups to attack China's facilities, Iran uses Hazara to hinder China's project construction also has risks.

Pakistan is deeply concerned about Chinese investment in Afghanistan. Pakistan believes the extension of the China-Pakistan economic corridor to Afghanistan could allow China to shift investment, paying attention to Afghanistan and ignoring Pakistan. Given CPEC's geopolitical and symbolic value for Pakistan and the consistent feud between Pakistan and Afghanistan over trade and security issues, it will be safe to assume that Pakistan will potentially be wary of diluting it with the addition of Afghanistan (Tourangbam & Saxena, 2020, August 14).

2.2 Internal Threats in Afghanistan

Firstly, on August 19, 2020, Wang Yi, State Councillor and Foreign Minister, called Atmar, Foreign Minister of Afghanistan. Wang Yi said that the current peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan is entering a critical period, which is related to the future fate of Afghanistan. As Afghanistan's most trustworthy neighbor, China is more likely to see Afghanistan achieve peace, stability and reconstruction than any other country. The intra-Afghan negotiations are the key to achieving peace and reconciliation. At this important historical moment, all Afghan parties should focus on the long-term interests of the country, move oppositely and properly deal with differences. This process should be based on the premise of maintaining peace and stability in the country, and can't allow the recurrence of civil strife or even civil war, and can't allow terrorist forces to take the opportunity to rise again, endangering regional security (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, August 20).

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, we will actively promote the building of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Trans-Himalayan Connectivity network, support the extension of the corridor to Afghanistan, and further unleash the dividends of regional connectivity. As the new heightened intelligence-sharing arrangement between China and Pakistan accelerates, Beijing's influence in Afghanistan will also expand (Canyon & Sitaraman, 2020, February 21).

Wang Yi, China's foreign minister said: We will actively promote the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Himalayan cross-border connection network, support the extension of the corridor to Afghanistan, and further release the dividend of regional connection. With the acceleration of new intelligence sharing arrangements between China and Pakistan, Chinese influence in Afghanistan will also expand.

Second, Afghan domestic problems have restricted the further development of China-Arab economic and trade cooperation. There are terrorist and extremist forces in Afghanistan, such as Taliban armed groups, the Haqqani network and the Islamic State. These forces inevitably pose a serious threat and negative impact on the normal development of China-Afghanistan economic and trade cooperation (Jie, 2017). In 2017, US President Trump took office. The United States began to change the Afghan policy, from the previous armed intervention to the present withdrawal. The situation in Afghanistan is volatile, whether the Taliban and the Afghan government can reach a settlement, the formation of a stable government is about China's investment in Afghanistan, but also about the stability of southwest China. According to the report released by the World Bank in 2020, Afghans business environment ranks 183 among 190 countries and regions in the world. The level of domestic economic development in Afghanistan is very low, the government's investment in infrastructure construction is seriously insufficient, domestic transportation is inconvenient, transportation costs are high, and power supply is tight, which makes the normal investment and operation activities of foreign investors in Afghanistan greatly affected and restricted (The World Bank, 2020. pp. 3-5).

Third, Severe ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan. There are serious ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan. The main ethnic groups in Afghanistan are Pushtun, Tajikistan and Hazara. Due to historical and religious factors, there are many contradictions between the Pashtuns and the Hazara. In particular, the Afghan Taliban, whose main source is Pashtun, are incompatible with the Hazara. Ethnic conflicts lead to mutual discrimination and hatred among Afghan ethnic groups. Identity politics led Pashtuns to rule other communities on behalf of the central government, the fragility of ethnic alliances in the Afghan Government and the exclusion of people outside the centre of power led to further social divisions.

In the end, there is corruption in the Government of Afghanistan. According to *Transparency International* 2015 Integrity Index, Afghanistan ranks 166th among 168 countries in the world, the world third-largest corrupt country. The serious corruption problem in Afghanistan has further increased the cost and time consumption of foreign investors, thereby greatly affecting their investment confidence. The 2019 Asia Foundation poll shows that most Afghans believe that corruption is a key

issue. In 2019, 81.5 % of Afghan respondents said that corruption was the main problem facing Afghanistan (Akseer & Haya, 2019, p.142). 75.6 % of urban residents and 65.3 % of rural residents regard corruption as the main problem (Akseer & Haya, 2019, p.143). 71.7 % of men and 64.2 % of women consider corruption extremely serious in Afghanistan (Akseer & Haya, 2019, p.144). The 10.3 per cent difference between urban and rural respondents may be due to more frequent contacts between urban residents and government officials and government agencies. Urban respondents in Afghanistan are therefore more exposed to corruption than rural respondents.

3. SUGGESTIONS ON CHINA'S INVESTMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Although the Afghan central government attaches great importance to the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, the domestic situation in Afghanistan is extremely complex. China's project construction in Afghanistan is facing severe challenges from international and local levels. Resolve or at least weaken negative effects.

Firstly, deepen the strategic partnership between China and Afghanistan, and lay a solid political foundation for the development of economic and trade cooperation between China and Afghanistan. First, political dialogue between the two governments should be strengthened. Political dialogue is one of the main ways to enhance political trust. China is close to Afghanistan and has common discourse and feelings in many aspects.

Second, focus on strengthening ties with local forces in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a society composed of tribes, with large and small tribes all over Afghanistan. Each tribe is an organized group, a self-contained world. The central government does not intervene in tribal affairs, and tribal organizations implement substantive autonomy to deal with political, economic and religious affairs. There are also a large number of local warlords in Afghanistan. Local armed leaders hold their own weight, regard the area under their control as an independent kingdom, and completely hold local fiscal taxes (Xuemei, 2019, p.121). China should communicate well with the various forces involved in the project.

Finally, paying attention to the relationship between development and tribal and local warlords forces can also effectively prevent security risks. Once there is a kidnapping incident against employees of Chinese companies, the tribal elders can be invited to make good offices to increase the chances for hostages to be rescued. Afghan Taliban attacks on our country's construction team and the potential risks to the China-Palestinian economic corridor posed by the obstruction of forces around Afghanistan, the use of livelihood projects for

local support, dialogue with Afghan non-governmental organizations, booking in local media, hiring locals as security guards, extensive contacts with Afghan politicians, increased contacts with the Taliban, and in-depth communication with local factions in the project construction sites.

For Afghanistan, China has both geographical advantages and mutual development needs. With the gradual withdrawal of the U.S. military and the accelerated peace process in Afghanistan, the situation in Afghanistan has not been the same as before. Afghanistan very welcomes China's Belt and Road initiative, China and Afghanistan in the process of exchanges, each other also left a profound positive impression. Afghanistan's national construction in the post-divestment era needs China's support. China's investment in Afghanistan has also proved its strength. In many projects extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, China plays a vital role and obtains good economic and social benefits.

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