

Дьяконова Мария Александровнаканд. полит. наук, ФГБОУ ВО
«Государственный университет
управления», г. Москва**e-mail:** marie.d@mail.ru**Шарипов Фанис Фалихович**канд. экон. наук, ФГБОУ ВО
«Государственный университет
управления», г. Москва**e-mail:** fanissh@rambler.ru**Dyakonova Marie**Candidate of Politic Sciences,
State University of Management,
Moscow**e-mail:** marie.d@mail.ru**Sharipov Fanis**Candidate of Economic Sciences,
State University of Management,
Moscow**e-mail:** fanissh@rambler.ru

КИТАЙ И АФГАНИСТАН В РАМКАХ НОВОГО ШЕЛКОВОГО ПУТИ

Аннотация. В настоящее время, благодаря китайской инициативе, делается уникальная попытка восстановить Древний Шелковый путь. Предполагается, что помимо ведения торговой деятельности, появится возможность более эффективно обмениваться знаниями, культурой и развивать новые технологии. В статье рассмотрены перспективы строительства Нового Шелкового Пути («Один пояс – один путь») для Центральной Азии, России, Китая и Афганистана, как одного из направлений. Выделены положительные и отрицательные аспекты этого проекта. **Ключевые слова:** Новый Шелковый Путь, Центральная Азия, Афганистан, Китай, Россия.

CHINA AND AFGHANISTAN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW SILK ROAD

Abstract. At present time thanks to the Chinese initiative a unique attempt to reestablish the Ancient Silk Road is carried out. It is supposed that besides implementation of trade activity, there will be an opportunity to exchange knowledge, culture and to develop new technologies more effectively. The prospects of realization of the New Silk Road or One Belt, One Road for Central Asia, Russia, China and Afghanistan as one of the directions – are considered. The positive and negative aspects of this project are emphasized.

Keywords: New Silk Road, Central Asia, Afghanistan, China, Russia.

Since ancient times, trade has been an important element in the development of states in economic, political, cultural and other spheres of mutually beneficial cooperation, adding momentum to these areas. One of such milestones is the trade bridge between China, India and other South-East Asian countries to Europe (European nations) known as the Silk Road. In the old days, cities and countries emerged and enjoyed rapid economic growth on its routes. The orbit of the Silk Road included China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asian and Transcaucasian countries. Afghanistan held the most advantageous geopolitical and geostrategic position. The Great Silk Road, which in ancient times enabled interaction between the East and the West, passed directly through it. However, as the technological progress developed and modern vehicles appeared, the Silk Road as it was became not cost-effective for a while [3].

Currently, in the context of the global changes in all spheres of life, the search for new possibilities and ways to establish political, economic and cultural relations, the resumption of such a road emerges full-blown. The New Silk Road or One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is a unique and important project of modern times, so to say, an advanced copy of the ancient Silk Road, talked about since the late 20th and early 21st century. In 2013, the leader of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping gave a new lease of life to the development of economic, political and cultural ties. Several potential options for laying overland routes: the Northern, Central and Southern, were anticipated [12]. The authors would like to focus on the Northern one, which has to pass along the following route: China – Central Asia – Russia – Europe.

For the Central Asian region and in particular for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, this project is a landmark. One Belt, One Road (OBOR) will stabilize the situation, improve the political and economic situation, expand foreign politics and investment for the reconstruction and development of the country as there has been the warfare in Afghanistan for decades, and the participation of all countries is required in order to make things better.

The implementation of One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is expected to take decades, the cost of it will amount to hundreds of billions of dollars USA [8]. For the time being, it is impossible to fully predict what it will mean for the world economy, but it is already clear that many companies and investors seek to join this project, not to miss the profit. The new Silk Road anticipates not only the growth of international trade, but also the knowledge sharing being critical nowadays, development of technologies and cultural exchange.

Economic preferences from the revival of the Silk Route are as follows:

- new routes will be created for expedited delivery of goods from Southeast Asia to Europe and back, that directly

affects the financial turnover time of trading and manufacturing companies, and the interchangeability of technologies and fashion of goods;

- active economic development of Central and Western China, establishment of appropriate infrastructure there to boost employment: the transport communications passing through the Central Asian states and their branches to Afghanistan would enable China to get closer to the mineral deposits in the region and to use cheaper labor in the future;
- for the Central Asian countries and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, conditions will be created to develop mining and related industries, and infrastructure, to involve a substantial part of the population in the production process, to promote the export of local products to the global market;
- Russia is, to some extent, also interested in the revitalization of the Silk Route, taking into account the above economic and financial benefits from the transit of goods. Meanwhile, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the individual options of this project are considered without the participation of the Russian Federation, i.e. routes passing through Transcaucasia, Iran (bypassing Russia) (see the map) [3].

At the recent Russia-Kazakhstan Business Forum, Nursultan Nazarbayev said that the mutual interest of our nations lies in establishing a strong transport and logistic infrastructure between Europe and Asia. In Kazakhstan, the transport corridors from East to West, from North to South are already formed. New routes through Kazakhstan from China into Russia and Europe via the Caspian Sea to the Caucasus and Turkey shall reduce the cargo delivery time twice at an average as compared to the traditional sea routes [10].

Another new route from Russia through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the Persian Gulf appeared. This is a through railway to the Middle East without transshipments between different transport modes. The time of cargo transportation from Siberia and the Urals to the Middle Eastern countries will be reduced by four days. Such opportunities did not exist before. However, cargo transportation from China to the Indian Ocean, taking into account the relief, has good prospects only when using the territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Given the positive factors of One Belt, One Road (OBOR), it is impossible not to take into account the negative ones: when implementing this project, some conflicts may occur, which could lead to a new cold war between the East and the West for dominance in Eurasia [3; 11].

When announcing the opening of the economic belt, the People's Republic of China leader Xi Jinping assured that China does not seek to dominate in the region or to create a zone of influence there. While expressing the good intentions, Beijing called for cooperation with Moscow. China does not intend to propose projects to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation and bilateral relations, which China values highly [1; 9].

The relationship of the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan proceeds from the premise that they are neighbors as well. Although, the length of their common border is only 92,45 km in hard-to-reach highlands. On the Chinese side, the border administrative unit is the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and on the Afghan side – the Badakhshan Province. The main problem here are Uighur separatist groups and their alleged links with rebel groups in Afghanistan. In this regard, Beijing cannot ignore the Afghan factor in its foreign policy and foreign economic sectors [2].

According to certain analysts, two facts foster the interaction between China and Afghanistan. Firstly, the ability to theoretically provide the construction of infrastructure in Afghanistan thanks to the financial resources of China. Secondly, the traditionally friendly relations between PRC and Pakistan [5]. This circumstance will help Beijing use the Pakistani resource for forging an intra-Afghan dialogue (influence of Pakistani intelligence services on the Taliban).

However, it should be borne in mind that Pakistan is not interested in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and strengthening its economic and military power before the territorial disputes with the IRA (along the so-called Durand Line) are settled. This factor should be taken into account when implementing the project, as security in the border areas cannot be guaranteed.

China is taking measures to strengthen relations with Afghanistan. Thus, in March this year, a PRC delegation headed by General Fang Fenghui, Chief of Staff, visited Kabul. At a meeting with Ashraf Ghani, President of IRA, General Fang promised support for the efforts of the Afghan Government to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. In addition, China also supports the membership of IRA in SCO and the counter-terrorism association of member countries. A senior official from China announced that additional 480 million yuan (72 million dollars USA) shall be granted to the Afghan Armed Forces [7].

Despite the heavy political, economic, social and cultural situation in Afghanistan, the positive trends in cooperation with the Central Asian countries, China and the Russian Federation are obvious, Afghanistan has gained considerable

experience of participation in trans-regional economic projects. In the face of an imminent withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country, Kabul will be forced to intensify its efforts to build a more active cooperation with neighbors, including those located in the post-Soviet Central Asia. Thus, the China's New Silk Road strategy may become the most promising for IRA trans-regional project.

In view of this, in May 2016, during the visit of Abdullah Abdullah to Beijing, two agreements on cooperation between Afghanistan and China were signed. In particular, Salahuddin Rabbani, Chief Executive of Afghanistan and Minister of Foreign Affairs, met Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of PRC, and Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who have signed an agreement on technical cooperation, production and export of Afghan saffron, and a memorandum of understanding on the New Silk Road project [4].

It should be noted that, the first railroad connecting the two countries was built in Afghanistan within this program, with the support of China. Thus, in the autumn this year, a cargo train from the Jiangsu Province (China) arrived in Hairatan (Afghanistan) [6].

There are more positive than negative aspects of this project for each member of such a unique and great project as the New Silk Road or One Belt, One Road. And we hope that the realization of this project will help to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

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