

The Importance of Lapis Lazuli Corridor for Afghanistan

Mohammad Talib Tariq

Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Badakhshan, AFGHANISTAN.

Corresponding Author: taruqtaruq1985@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

Lapis lazuli corridor is one of the most important and new transit routes which Afghanistan connects to central Asia countries and other countries. Lapis Lazuli corridor has a historical background and was part of the Silk Road through which the lapis lazuli of Afghanistan (from Badakhshan) was exported over 2000 years ago to the Caucasus, Russia, the Balkans, Europe, and North Africa, especially to the eastern civilizations along the ancient Silk Road. The lapis lazuli trade route connects Afghanistan and South Asia countries with Europe by roads and rails. It is considered one of the shortest and most reliable transit routes for Afghanistan where it has named a landlocked country, in order to get connected to Europe. The importance of this route is that to emerge as an economic corridor for inclusive development by which Afghanistan will be connected to Europe, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and then to Europe. It will connect Afghanistan through land and sea with developed and economic zones of central Asia and European countries, where it will provide more opportunities for Afghanistan to trade its all kind of products to other nations. In addition, it will be discussed the importance of this transit route for Afghanistan as a new economic policy of Afghanistan which conducted by Afghan government to connect this country with Central Asia countries and Europe. The main object of this essay covers the socio-cultural significances of the lapis lazuli route for Afghanistan and other nations which located on this way. Moreover, I will find out the cultural and social importance of lapis lazuli corridor in this essay to know its geographical location and its other important issues from articles and journals which discuss about the lapis lazuli corridor as a new economic way for Afghanistan.

Keywords- lapis lazuli, corridor, Silk Road, transit and economic.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the end of Second World War the turbulent world entered a new page where international relations and relations between cultures and nations become the most important. The process of globalization, regional communication and mutual ties more developed and new links were incorporated in the politics of powers. Afghanistan is one of the countries of particular geopolitical and geo-strategic importance in the region, which is conducive to good economic and business conditions for sustainable development in the region. As the formation of the coal and steel community in European countries was the point of departure for these countries towards European regionalism, it was the kind of policy that made these countries' regional politics more international. Afghanistan has also pursued this policy because of its economic and political struggles in the

Asia-Pacific region for economic and security stability, which could in the future serve as a major trading area in Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Because Afghanistan is a heartland in the region, it has played an important role as a transit corridor, strategic gateway and communication in the region and as an important communication network in integrating, connecting and linking East and West culture and economics together.

The Silk Road in Afghanistan's past and in the Asian civilization history has taken its high place and has been regarded as the world's largest transit highway in the pages of history. For this reason, Lapis lazuli project is intended for regional cooperation between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, which is the most convenient, cheapest and safest way to connect Afghanistan internationally to Central Asia and European countries. Developing regional meetings and agreements such as Rika, Istanbul, and Tashkent agreements, lapis

lazuli Road, Silk Road, TOPI and CASA have played a major role in Afghanistan from being locked up and imprisoned geographical conditions. This opportunity provides more facilities for Afghanistan to be connected with global markets and regional scope. Implementation of the lapis lazuli Agreement will create a new economic chance for Afghanistan to transit its goods for other nations and world market. It will also improve mutual connections and provides a better economic zone for Afghanistan in upcoming years.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a fundamental and content research about the lapis lazuli corridor and its economic and cultural importance for Afghanistan. The methodology and method of collecting information or data in this research is documentary and library which is analyzed in a descriptive-analytic way to give information about the subject. This study is characterized by a qualitative and content approach that explores the great and importance of social and cultural significance of the Lapis lazuli corridor, in relation to its political and economic advantage in Afghanistan and other countries where the lapis lazuli corridor will be connected. On the other hand, it will attempted to systematically investigate and analyze the case in a scientific theory to highlight the importance of the lapis lazuli transit corridor in the world market for better understanding and knowing.

III. THEORETICAL APPROACH

The transit corridor, called the lapis lazuli (Lajward) Road, is a new highway where connecting Afghanistan to the open waters of the world especially Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia which are linked to the Black Sea and crossing from Turkish to other regions. This transit line has a long history and was part of an ancient corridor, known as the Silk Road, dating back 2000 years ago. The Asia-Europe transit route which is called lapis lazuli way is about 2800km, starting from Afghanistan [ports of Torghundi(herat) and Aqina(faryab)] and ending at Turkminbashi port of Turkmenistan and then connects to the Baku city of Azerbaijan and Tiphlis region of Georgia. Finally, it crosses from Tiphlis to Qars of Turkey, from Qars to Istanbul and then to Europe.

It was one of the great initiatives of Afghanistan that was signed by the government of Afghanistan after numerous negotiations at the Istanbul (Asia summit) and for the first time in the new history of Afghanistan. It was able to connect to the open waters of the world, which is open to all nations to be used. As Afghanistan is a new and emerging power, the social and cultural components can help it connect and externalize the country with rapid growth and development along other regions. On the other hand, Afghanistan is among the countries, it has no good place in economic aspects so any effort to bring

Afghanistan into the global equation and attract world attention for regional peace and integration will be a major achievement in this country, which defines the successful policy of Afghanistan in the foreign diplomacy. (Sazmand, 2011:1-3)

IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROUTE

Afghanistan has a long history and was as a bridge between the old centers of civilizations and cultures such as China, India, and Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, Egyptian and Greek civilizations. It was playing an important and vital role in acquaintance, mixing and merging in Human civilizations. Afghanistan has witnessed so many cultural histories and hosted Vedic cultures and civilizations, the Avesta culture, Buddhist and at the end the Islamic civilization. Greek and Buddhist civilizations are one of the most magnificent periods of Afghanistan history compared to the cultural relevance of the Kushanid era, as the Silk Road is associated with this period. Kaneshka was a powerful Kushan empire who played a major role in linking of Afghanistan and based backbone of Afghanistan's connection to the world at that time and played an important role in the development of the Silk Road, the largest communication network in the ancient world. According to the famous American historian Wildu rant: the Silk Highway was a convoy that transported precious stones from eastern regions to the civilizations of the Mesopotamian coast. There is historical evidence that the lapis lazuli of Badakhshan was traded to the western civilizations in 5500 BC. Archaeological discovery of lapis lazuli at the Tomb of Mesopotamia, Kashan Iran, and Egypt's Pharaohs represents this historic and cultural link of the ancient world on the Silk Route that Afghanistan has played an important role in connecting to it. Around 4000 BC, lapis lazuli was traded from eastern of Afghanistan and merchants donated it to the Gods and Code of the Sumerian and Babylonian women.

According to French archaeologist Alfred Fossa: the Silk Road had an extraordinary importance in the transmission of culture, religion and world politics in addition to commercial importance. (Panjshiri, 2008: 4).

The geographical position of Afghanistan, according historians has the advantage of pride more than any other factor because it has a mountain road at the crossroads of the Asian highway that can be described as the harbor of the ancient world. According to Toen bey: Afghanistan has played the most important role in the geopolitical and geostrategic developments of the region. The powerful Roman emperor, the Indian Empire, the powerful Kushan government, and other dynasties in China have used the Silk Road as a communication corridor for centuries.

According to Napoleon Bonaparte, each country's policy is based on its geography. To the extent

that the natural and geographical events of each region alone can contribute to regional developments. One of the most important regional policies of the world today is the doctrine of the new international order, followed by the strategy of expansion. The lapis lazuli Way, therefore, has been one of the most important development and development policies of Afghanistan in the regional communication which is aimed at economic and cultural progress in the region. (sazmand,2011:19)

The history of Afghanistan says that in the two thousand centuries BC lapis lazuli was exported from Afghanistan to centers of the world, due to the fact that this road was named lapis lazuli, According to Anima Pendas, the naming of this new economic corridor of Asian countries, called the lapis lazuli Highway, has its roots in the historical background of which lapis lazuli was exported from the Hindu Kush and Badakhshan mountains of northeastern Afghanistan about 2000 years ago. The lapis lazuli Road was initiated by the Afghan government and proposed by the country a few years ago, with its first technical group meeting being held in Turkmenistan's Foreign Ministry on 5 November, with representatives from five countries. Finally, after four years of negotiations between the member states, the Agreement was signed at the end of the seventh Rika Regional Cooperation Summit in 2017.

In this context, the new route proposed by the Afghan government will connect Afghanistan to the Black Sea through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Black Sea, crossing Turkey. The same route that lapis lazuli had been exported to Central Asian and European countries for centuries. In its regional policy, Afghanistan has mobilized its neighbors, especially the Balkan countries, to bring about regional integration and is the best political diplomacy in its external relations. Afghan politicians have sought to expand international relations between Afghanistan and neighboring countries by pursuing RECA meetings in Kabul, New Delhi, Islamabad and Dushanbe with the participation of politicians in the region. (shariati,2016:34-36)

V. THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF LAPIS LAZULI CORRIDOR

The most important characteristic of international relations today is convergence and internationalism, which contradicts national regionalism. International cooperation for economic development as a political act of countries in their foreign relations is one of the most important political parameters in the foreign diplomacy to play an international role for strengthening and regional development. On the other hand, international cooperation for development with the cooperation of partner governments, such as the payment system and technical assistance, will accelerate the process of globalization of nations and will provide global security.

Afghanistan, which is called a country where still does not have a good place in international relations, but is one of the countries that attracted the deep attention of the international community in financial and technical development. These relations can only be achieved when Afghanistan's foreign and political policy approaches to highlight its global position in the region and then in the world. Afghanistan, given its status in Asia, as a communication corridor between cultures and nations, enjoys the privilege of being able to make a political presence in the interactions and equations of major powers by establishing its foreign and political relations. (zardih ,2017: 238-223)

The lapis lazuli corridor is one of Afghanistan most enduring policies in the years ahead as Afghanistan steps into the international economy, telecommunications, technical information, and management and transportation technology. It has accelerated the transition to regional and international relations, making it for Afghanistan easier, cheaper, and more useful. The Afghanistan government will be able to move faster towards globalization in international collusion and cooperation. The process of globalization or economic, political, cultural, and social interaction will be created vast interconnections between places and led to widespread mobility of people, information, labor management, international order, global security and capital across borders of the countries. The Lapis lazuli way is the great message of the Afghan people in the process of globalization that with our open door policy, Afghanistan can directly interact with the world and play better fields in its foreign and regional policy. The cultural and social processes involved by the lapis lazuli transit path in Afghanistan are that we can contribute to global politics at a large scale and play better economic interactions in the regions (Haidari,2017 :77).

The lapis lazuli route connects Afghanistan to Asia through the European part of the former Soviet Union, Western countries and across the Mediterranean to North Africa and southern European countries. The Caspian Sea is on its way to connect Afghanistan to Russia and northern Iran. For this reason, the lapis lazuli Road, as an important strategic gateway to the region, will bring Afghanistan into the world market and provide the opportunity to move domestic production from Afghanistan to overseas. So, the lapis lazuli transit route is one of the Silk Roads that connect the South Asian countries to European countries by road and rail, which is the cheapest, safest and fastest transit route for Afghanistan. A country that has always faced geographical challenges and barriers from neighboring, at the expense of huge economic costs. Afghanistan has a fragile economy that cannot operate in the region because of its insecurity. So the Lapis lazuli way has added to the diversity of Afghanistan's business relationship and has brought new hope in regional and international politics. (shamal,2014:35-38)

VI. THE LAPIS LAZULI; HOPES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As the Silk Road represents the manifestation of our country's historical and cultural heritage, in addition to connecting the Middle East to Europe, it has always been a means of conveying cultural, religious and racial divides for years. The Silk Road was instrumental in enriching the lives of the peoples of the East and West, making the trade caravans along the Silk Road familiar with the various trades of the various countries and the cultural, artistic, and commercial connections along this transit road. (Panjshiri,2008:130-128)

The lapis lazuli Road, as part of the Silk Road, plays a cultural and civilizing role in connecting Afghanistan to the countries of the region, which is one of the most strategic diplomacy and the most important focus of Afghan foreign policy in the present days. The road is one of Afghanistan's major foreign policy initiatives to expand its economic influence elsewhere. Afghanistan's efforts to move forward with such projects could have economic and political implications for this country. The strategic importance of this corridor is follow.

- 1- Regional convergence and internationalism.
- 2- Increase macroeconomic interactions.
- 3- Connecting to free water.
- 4- Selling domestic products and exporting them to the World Market.
- 5- Enhancing domestic competitiveness and promoting a balanced domestic economy.
- 6- The motivation for domestic investment.
- 7- Establishment of business relations and entry of foreign trade property into Afghanistan.
- 8- Membership in international covenants and treaties.
- 9- Striving for regional security and peace.
- 10- A multitude of transit and trade partners in Afghanistan.

The Lapis lazuli way as a road to regional peace and the road to prosperity is the path that will help Afghanistan to integrate peacefully and co-exist in the region and to cooperate with countries. As the Silk Road is thousands of kilometers away and its millennial track record of cooperation, peace, inclusive freedom and great connections is world renowned. The Lapis lazuli way is also of great importance as a cultural and valuable geographical heritage and part of the Silk Road in the region. As it is notable to mention, Regional economic integration is one of the most important pillars of our foreign policy. Experience has shown that pursuing winning and losing policies and strategies in the form of wars imposed on Afghanistan undermines regional stability and impedes sustainable economic growth and development.

Therefore, since the first RECA held in Kabul in 2005, we have made great efforts to transform Afghanistan into a crossroads of trade, transit, and investment, communication, and exchange of ideas in the

heart of Asia, and no doubt Our region in Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe helps to connect.

The most promising hope for the people of Afghanistan is the realization of the Memorandum of Understanding and the promises made by member states to Afghanistan, which will reduce the time and cost of trade, and eliminate the barriers to customs and transit. On the other hand, there will be more markets for selling Afghan products in the global market, as they do not impose any taxes or restrictions on Afghan property according to their agreement. By way of lapis lazuli Road, Afghan vehicles can enter and exit the territory of any member state to load and unload customs duties and expand bilateral and multilateral trade between these countries. Because any measure that provides a new transit route to Afghanistan will facilitate greater access to national and international services, reduce political dependencies, and provide growth and economic growth in the country. (Haqiqi 2012: 121-118).

VII. CONCLUSION

The Lapis lazuli way is one of Afghanistan's largest initiatives in regional and international politics, through which Afghanistan will reach Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean coast, which is an international open-water area, and thus position itself. Regional and global trade policy will take place. The Lapis lazuli transit highway is not only of regional importance in terms of transportation and commerce, but it also has unique cultural and international connections. The Lapis lazuli way represents the collective security and regional peace of which one of its most important advantages is the logical and peaceful coexistence of the region. It has an influential role in Asian countries, and countries in the region cannot ignore Afghanistan's role in growing, developing and strengthening their political and economic ties. Building on the ranks of the countries in the region, Afghanistan has opened up new hopes for business development and trade relations. The overriding purpose of signing the Lapis lazuli way Agreement is to strengthen communications between Member States by establishing a systematic and coherent transit system between the Afghan Government efforts to strengthen connectivity and expand trade through investment in infrastructure and improved cooperation.

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