

Criteria for Success: An Economic Strategy for Afghanistan

First, directly and manifestly improve the lives of Afghans, Pakistanis, and people in those Central Asian states that are key to this region-wide project.

Second, pursue an economic strategy simultaneously with the military strategy, in such a way that the two are mutually reinforcing.

Third, leave the Afghan government with an income stream. Today the United States is paying the salaries of all Afghan soldiers and civil servants. This cannot go on forever.

Fourth, implement an economic strategy that works fast, showing substantial results within the next 18–24 months. Overall, economic progress will create the conditions that will enable a shift from military power to economic and social betterment.

“Sound strategy demands the use of all the instruments of power. This vision for Afghanistan and the region makes a compelling case that transport and trade can help restore the central role of Afghanistan in Central Asia. By once again becoming a transport hub, Afghanistan can regain economic vitality and thrive as it did in the days of the Silk Road.”

—General David H. Petraeus

Authors:



S. Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, has been writing on transport issues in Afghanistan and Central Asia for a decade. In his essay “In Defense of Greater Central Asia” (2008) he introduced the notion of a major economic and cultural zone with Afghanistan at its heart. In the volume *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia* (2007) he translated this into continental terms, based on transport and trade. In his prize-winning essay “Rediscovering Central Asia” (2008) he presented the deeper historical sources of continental trade and suggested they could become the source of modern cultural revival. In addition to these works, Starr’s research has resulted in 20 books and 200 published articles. Prior to founding the Institute, Dr. Starr served as founding director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies and as president of Oberlin College and of the Aspen Institute.



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The Key to Success in Afghanistan

A MODERN SILK ROAD STRATEGY

Highlights from the report



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The Goal

Reestablish Afghanistan's traditional role as transportation and trade hub linking Europe and the Middle East with the Indian sub-continent and all South and Southeast Asia.



The Key to Success

Prioritization, risk management, and coordination of ongoing and future initiatives of many nations, molded into a unified strategy to enable Afghanistan to emerge as a natural hub and transit point for roads, railways, pipelines, and electric lines.

“Once we are on our feet with our own economy, with our mineral resources, with our businesses, with Afghanistan becoming a hub for transportation in Central Asia and South and West Asia..., Afghanistan will remain a strong and good and economically viable partner with the United States and our other allies.”

—President Hamid Karzai

A Highly Visible Transport-Based Strategy

Acknowledges the reality that the Afghan struggle is regional in scope, and affects the rest of Central Asia, Pakistan, India, China, and Iran and must be regionally addressed.

Priority Projects

- Completion of the Afghan Ring Road and Kabul-Herat highway, linking them to continental trunk routes, and especially to the Pakistani port at Gwadar.
- Completing trans-Afghan rail lines linking Europe and Asia.
- Constructing the Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) pipeline.
- Completing electrical transmission lines linking Central Asia, Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and India.
- Prompt removal of existing bottlenecks and corrupt practices preventing the quick transit of goods, especially bureaucratic impediments at Afghanistan's borders and key borders further afield (*soft infrastructure*).

Near-Term Objectives

Successful implementation of a transport-based strategy for Afghanistan and the region depends on the ability of the U.S. government to organize itself based on circumstances within Afghanistan.

This requires:

- A concrete operational plan backed by the U.S. and other interested governments.
- A high-level interagency structure within the U.S. government with the power to initiate and implement such a plan.
- The existence of solid communication and coordination between government and the private sector, both in the United States and in the region.

In keeping with this, the United States must designate a high-level official to lead a major interagency task force that will work closely with military and civilian leaders in the United States, in Afghanistan, among coalition partners, and in regional states. Use all tools at the disposal of the U.S. government to engage the private sector.