



## **From Karachi to Chabahar: Afghanistan's Strategy for Diversifying Trade and Transit Routes**

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### ***Abstract***

*In the contemporary global landscape, having access to international waters constitutes a significant geopolitical asset. Afghanistan's landlocked status, however, deprives it of this strategic advantage. Thus, making it more vulnerable and dependent to its southern neighbor Pakistan for trade and transit. Afghanistan's primary goal is to reduce its dependence on Pakistan's transit routes, expand trade, and generally improve its economic situation. Accordingly, Afghanistan has pursued multiple alternative options to diversify its trade and transit routes with the outside world. This paper examines the extent to which Afghanistan's trade and transit diversification strategy has been successful and assesses whether, amid regional geopolitical shifts, it has reduced the country's dependence on its southern neighbor, Pakistan. Using secondary sources, this study applies analytical and descriptive methods. The findings reveal that Afghanistan's trade and transit diversification strategy has come to fruition amid regional geopolitical shifts, and that the country is no longer solely dependent on its southern neighbor, Pakistan, for trade and transit. While Afghanistan has diversified its trade and transit options, the Chabahar port and the Iranian route appear to be the most viable alternatives.*

***Keywords:*** *Afghanistan, Trade and transit diversification, Regional connectivity, Chabahar Port, Karachi Port, Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, Regional integration.*

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## **Introduction**

The traditional and current route linking Afghanistan to international waters is through Pakistan's Port of Karachi, which has, on multiple occasions since Pakistan's inception, been used as a political tool to exert pressure on Afghanistan. The most recent instance occurred following the October 2025 conflict between the two countries, when Pakistan obstructed Afghanistan's trade routes, including access to its ports, thereby leveraging economic pressure as a political tool. Afghanistan, acutely aware of its geopolitical vulnerability and economic reliance on its southern neighbor Pakistan for trade and transit, has consistently pursued a strategy to diversify its trade and transit routes. This paper assesses the extent to which Afghanistan's trade and transit diversification strategy has been successful and examines whether, amid regional geopolitical shifts, it has reduced the country's dependence on its southern neighbor, Pakistan. This paper hypothesizes that the Chabahar Port is emerging not only as a strategic alternative to Afghanistan's reliance on Karachi Port, but that Afghanistan's broader strategy of trade and transit diversification in recent years is demonstrating resilience in the face of Pakistan's blockages. Most notably, Iran's Chabahar Port route, given its proximity, is proving to be the best alternative for reducing the pressures and challenges associated with the Pakistani route. Afghanistan has successfully established multiple axes of integration with its neighboring and regional countries. This paper assesses Afghanistan's strategy for diversifying trade and transit routes amid regional geopolitical shifts.

Afghanistan due to its geography has five transit routes for accessing international waters and global markets. The closest access routes for Afghanistan to international waters are through its two southern and western neighbors, Pakistan and Iran. The other three routes are through Central Asia linking Afghanistan to China, Russia and the Caspian Sea Region ultimately reaching Europe. This paper examines Afghanistan's five major transit routes, focusing on how the country has developed multiple axes of integration to diversify its trade and transit options.

### **Pakistan's Trade and Transit Route**

Pakistan's transit route has been the main and traditional route for Afghanistan's trade and transit. Despite, political issues, such as Afghanistan's opposition to Pakistan's membership in the United Nations and Afghanistan's non-recognition of the Durand Line resulting in distrust and instability, relations between the two countries have continued in all areas, including in trade and transit. Afghanistan signed its first transit agreement with Pakistan in 1965. Later, the outdated agreement was replaced by Afghanistan, Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA) in 2010. But Pakistan, since its inception has repeatedly used its trade and transit routes as a political tool to exert pressure on Afghanistan defying existing agreements and International Law. Given Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan for trade and transit, it was vulnerable to Pakistan blockages and other mal practices such as detaining Afghan goods for extended periods, increasing taxes on Afghan goods, and various other forms of discriminations and inhuman behavior against the Afghan side. However, Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan, along with the strategic vulnerabilities it creates, is steadily declining as the country pursues alternative trade and transit options.

This was proven recently when both countries clashed along the Durand line in October 2025 after Pakistan's violation of Afghanistan's airspace. And history repeated itself yet again when Pakistan effectively blocked Afghanistan's trade and transit route. But this time, Afghanistan too, instructed its traders to use alternative routes for trade and transit and even banned the import of all pharmaceutical goods from Pakistan. The Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs of Afghanistan Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in a meeting with traders and industrialists in Kabul said that "All industrialists and traders in the country should turn to alternative trade routes instead of Pakistan. Trade through Pakistan has not only harmed our merchants but has also caused problems for markets and the general public" (Erfanyar, 2025). Political tensions have adversely affected and completely stalled economic and commercial exchanges between the two countries. However, in this instance, Afghanistan's strategy of diversifying its trade and transit

routes has demonstrated resilience and reduced the country's vulnerabilities to Pakistan's blockages. Surprisingly, Afghanistan's economic performance has strengthened despite the blockages of its trade and transit routes by Pakistan. According to the World Bank report Afghanistan's exports rose 13% in October 2025 compared to September, even though trade routes with Pakistan remained closed since 9<sup>th</sup> October 2025. Food exports reached USD 238.4 million in October, which is an 8.6% year-on-year increase. Over the first seven months of the 2025 fiscal year, food exports rose more than 22%, strengthening their share in Afghanistan's export portfolio. Total exports during those first seven months reached roughly USD 1.1 billion — about a 10% increase compared to same period in the previous fiscal year (Lalzoy, 2025). The growth was driven by traders rerouting exports toward other markets such as Iran, India, Uzbekistan, Turkey, UAE, Kazakhstan, China, Russia, and other regional countries as well as by rising regional demand for Afghan agricultural products.

The reverse has been proving to be the case. Pakistan's blockage of Afghanistan's trade and transit route has negatively affected Pakistan itself. The closure of the trade route has had significant consequences for Pakistan, as it has lost the Afghan market for its pharmaceutical exports, agricultural products, and cement, while simultaneously experiencing unprecedented increases in the prices of fruits and vegetables within Pakistan (Khan, 2025). The closure not only halted Pakistan's trade with Afghanistan but also disrupted its exports and transit to Central Asia and Russia. Such a reversal is the result of Afghanistan's trade and transit diversification strategy, implemented amid a changing regional landscape, which has significantly reduced the country's reliance on Pakistan for trade and transit.

### **Afghanistan in a Shifting Regional Geopolitical Landscape**

The region witnessed a significant geopolitical shift when U.S. and NATO forces withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, resulting in a subsequent regime change and the return of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. The return of the Islamic Emirate not only pacified the region by bringing stability but also laid down the foundation for a

strong central government in Afghanistan ushering peace and security as well as political stability in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's balanced foreign policy doctrine—encompassing Islamic principles, independence, a positive and pragmatic engagement approach, neutrality amid great-power and regional rivalries, and an economic-centric approach —has played a central role in promoting stability within Afghanistan and across the wider region (Karimi, 2024) .

Accordingly, in this new period of its history, Afghanistan has prioritized economic diplomacy by adopting an economic-led foreign policy as part of its balanced foreign policy doctrine that seeks to expand its relations with neighboring countries, the region, and the world. In a recent visit to Malaysia, Mr. Abdul Hai Qanit, Director-General of the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Afghanistan, stated unequivocally that the country's focus has shifted from geopolitics to geo-economics and that it seeks positive relations not only with regional states but with all countries, based on shared interests and mutual respect (Suhaimi, 2025). The past four years have led Afghanistan moving towards regionalism. The region as a whole has given de facto recognition for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by keeping their embassies open in Kabul and continuing pragmatic diplomatic engagement. A major shift in regional geopolitics occurred when Russia officially recognized the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in July 2025. Even countries such as Tajikistan and India, which had previously rejected diplomatic engagement with Kabul, have since recalibrated their approach toward pragmatic diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan (Zaland, 2025). India has recently upgraded its technical mission in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy and has since hosted the Afghan foreign minister and other official delegations, reflecting a broader shift toward pragmatic regional diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan. This approach aligns with the consensus reached during the Moscow Format Consultations, in which Afghanistan, along with its neighboring countries and the wider region, unanimously rejected the deployment of any military infrastructure in Afghanistan (Reuters & Quillen, 2025).

Over the past four years, Afghanistan's active and pragmatic regional engagement, focusing on economic diplomacy and geo-economics, has facilitated the creation of multiple axes of integration with neighboring states, fostering cooperation and integration that has helped Afghanistan successfully diversify its trade and transit routes.

### **The Afghanistan–Iran–India Axis of Integration**

The port of Chabahar in southern Iran is the closest trade route for Afghanistan even closer than the Pakistani route. This route is the closest access for Afghanistan to open and international waters. Lower costs due to the shorter distance and the subsequent economic advantages of trading through this route for Afghans and even Central Asian countries are among the other benefits of the Chabahar Port. Transit of goods through this port is considered the most economical option for conducting trade, offering the lowest transportation costs. As Iran's sole deep-water port on the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar offers direct connectivity to the Indian Ocean, enabling a critical sea–land corridor to Afghanistan and onward to Central Asia.

This route benefits from comparatively stable political relations between Afghanistan and Iran, in contrast to Afghanistan–Pakistan relations, which have become increasingly tense in recent times. Over the past four years, relationship between Iran and Afghanistan have been growing on a positive trajectory. Several high-ranking delegations from both countries have conducted official visits to each other's countries. The current Afghanistan-Iran bilateral trade stands at \$3.5 billion and both the countries are keen to increase it to \$10 billion in the near future. Both countries are seeking to expand bilateral trade and explore new investment opportunities (Murad, 2025).

Another important milestone in Afghanistan-Iran trade relations was the completion and operationalization of the Khaf-Herat railway line since July 2023 that connected Khaf in northeastern Iran to Herat in western Afghanistan, spanning approximately 225 km across both countries. This rail connection provides Afghanistan with a direct link to Iran's rail network and, by extension, a de facto connection to wider regional transport corridors, including the North-South corridor, a

7,200 km route connecting India with Russia via Iran. This railway connection also provided an axis of integration for trade and transit between Russia, Iran and Afghanistan. Russia's first oil export to Afghanistan took place in November 2025 using this railway line as it exported 5000 tons of diesel fuel via the Iranian railways reaching Roznak railway station in Herat (Burna-Asefi, 2025). Iran has also commenced exporting its oil to Afghanistan using this railway line. The Khaf-Herat Railway Project is part of a larger railway project (Five Nation Railway Corridor) that aims to connect Iran with China and Central Asia via Afghanistan. Further expansion of the project could transform northern Afghanistan by connecting key border points such as Torghundi and Aqina with Turkmenistan, Hairatan with Uzbekistan, and Sher Khan Bandar with Tajikistan. From there, the railway could extend through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, ultimately reaching China. The completion of the Khaf-Herat railway line is strategically significant for promoting economic integration and connecting Afghanistan to wider regional transport networks, including facilitating transit access to ports such as the Chabahar port.

The institutionalization of the Chabahar initiative unfolded incrementally over decades. Afghanistan, Iran, and India first signed an agreement in 2002 to utilize the Chabahar Port. Subsequently, Afghanistan and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on this issue in May 2012. In May 2015, India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iran to develop the Chabahar Port. This process culminated in 2016, when India, Iran, and Afghanistan concluded a trilateral transit corridor agreement allowing Indian goods to reach Afghanistan via Chabahar by linking western Indian ports to Chabahar and establishing road and rail connections between Chabahar and the Afghan border. The first use of the port for Afghan trade occurred in 2017, when India dispatched its initial consignment of wheat to Afghanistan. Afghan cargo exports to India followed in 2019. A major milestone, however, was achieved in May 2024, when India signed a 10-year long-term contract with Iran for the operation of the Chabahar Port, an agreement that superseded all previous

arrangements. India's engagement in the development and utilization of the Chabahar Port reflects a significant and credible international presence, contributing considerable political and financial support to the port. Notably, the exemption of the Chabahar Port from Western sanctions imposed on Iran has significantly enhanced its strategic and operational viability. As of 30 October 2025, the Chabahar port received a six-month sanctions waiver, and this exemption is likely to be extended due to India's continued presence and strategic role in the port's operations.

This axis of integration between Afghanistan, Iran, and India has proven resilient in the face of Pakistan's blockage of Afghan trade and transit since 12–13 October 2025, with Iranian transport routes and the Chabahar port gaining even greater significance. In a recent meeting between Afghanistan's ambassador to Iran and the Chairman of the Chabahar Free Zone, both sides discussed the facilitation of visas for Afghan traders, the opening of a representative office for the Afghan side, and the establishment of a joint bank between the two countries (Kakar, 2025). As of 2025, the Chabahar port is fully operational and trade between Afghanistan and India via Chabahar port is growing and gaining significance. Iran is currently Afghanistan's top trading partner. Iranian transit routes have reduced Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan's transit routes, expanded bilateral trade, and improved the overall economic relationship between the two countries. Afghanistan is now importing pharmaceutical products from Iran and India instead of Pakistan. Another important development was the relaunch of air cargo services between Afghanistan and India. Both countries are restoring trade ties through the resumption of the Kabul–Delhi and Kabul–Amritsar airfreight corridors, critical trade routes that had been disrupted since 2020 (Prusty, 2025). The Kandahar–Delhi cargo flights is also expected to become operational in the near future. Historically rooted cordial relations between the two countries are likely to persist, reflecting continuity in their diplomatic engagement.

Iranian trade and transit routes, particularly the Chabahar Port, are increasingly demonstrating their viability not only as an alternative to

Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistani trade routes and ports (such as Karachi and Gwadar), but also as a strategic corridor linking South Asia with Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan, should Islamabad continue its current obstructive policies.

The Iranian route would compel Pakistan not only to reduce obstacles for Afghan traders but also to refrain from obstructing Afghan trade and transit through its routes, while taking steps toward implementing the APTA agreement and lowering or eliminating additional transit costs and fees, such as demurrage charges. This could effectively push Pakistan to compete with Iran in providing transit routes for Afghanistan.

### **The Afghanistan–Uzbekistan–Kazakhstan Axis of Integration**

One of Afghanistan's most strategically significant trade and transit corridors operates through Uzbekistan, with which Afghanistan maintains a direct railway connection. Uzbekistan is among the very few doubly landlocked countries and, like Afghanistan, lacks direct access to international maritime routes. This corridor is facilitated via the Hairatan Port on the Amu Darya River, a critical logistical gateway that is directly linked by rail to Mazar-e-Sharif, a major urban and economic center in northern Afghanistan, thereby enhancing cross-border trade and regional connectivity. Similar to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is strategically positioning itself as a regional logistics hub linking Russia, China, Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and broader international markets. Afghanistan exports to Russia and China via Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan corridor. Kazakhstan another landlocked middle power country in Central Asia is increasingly boosting trade and economic relations with Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan–Uzbekistan–Kazakhstan axis of integration has proven resilient following Pakistan's blockage of Afghan trade and transit on 12–13 October 2025. The Uzbekistan route has increasingly proven to be a viable alternative to Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistani trade corridors. The bulk of trade and transit between Afghanistan and Central Asia occurs via this route, with the Uzbekistan–Kazakhstan corridor connecting Afghanistan to both Russia and China. Trade

between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan has grown significantly in recent years. According to the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan exported approximately \$1.3 billion worth of goods to Afghanistan in the first eleven months of 2025 (Ariana News, 2025).

In June 2025, during the 4th Tashkent International Investment Forum, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan formalized a Preferential Trade Agreement aimed at enhancing bilateral economic relations. The accord seeks to facilitate trade by reducing tariffs and eliminating trade barriers, thereby streamlining the flow of goods between the two countries. In addition, it establishes a joint cooperation framework for 2025–2026 encompassing trade, industrial, and agricultural sectors. Both governments have lauded the agreement as a “historic foundation” for strengthening economic ties and promoting more efficient bilateral commerce (The Tashkent Times, 2025). In his recent article the President of Uzbekistan called Afghanistan an integral part of Central Asia.

Since October 2025, Afghan traders have increasingly redirected their imports toward Central Asia, with the majority of this trade occurring with Uzbekistan. Afghanistan has perceived the closure of Pakistani trade routes as an opportunity to diversify its supply sources, and Central Asian countries have emerged as reliable providers of essential goods, including food and fuel. Uzbekistan has now joined the list of countries exporting cement and medicines to Afghanistan.

### **The Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Caspian Littoral States Axis of Integration**

The Turkmenistan route includes the Caspian Sea littoral states, excluding Iran with which Afghanistan shares land border; it therefore consists of Kazakhstan, Russia, and Azerbaijan. Through this sea, Afghanistan can access Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and other countries beyond the Caspian Sea, and even reach Europe. Advantage of this route is that Turkmenistan has adopted a policy of neutrality in its foreign relations since 1995. Under this circumstance, Afghanistan can engage with the countries along this route with greater confidence and without political concerns.

This route enables Afghanistan to establish commercial relations with the Caspian Sea littoral states and creating a new pathway for Afghanistan to develop trade relations with Europe via Azerbaijan. One such corridor along this route was initiated by Afghanistan as Lapis Lazuli corridor which was received positively by the regional countries as an Afghan-led initiative. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor promotes cooperation in transit, trade, and transport among Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, with the objective of reducing transit and trade barriers and enhancing joint customs operations, thereby providing an alternative transit route for Afghanistan to access maritime ports. For Afghanistan, this route is significant as it represents the shortest, most economical, and most reliable means of access to the aforementioned regions. This transit corridor begins at the Aqina port in Faryab Province and the Torghundi port in Herat Province, continues through the Turkmenbashi port in Turkmenistan, crosses the Caspian Sea to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and then proceeds to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, extending to the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi. Additionally, via the city of Kars, the corridor connects to the ports of Istanbul in Türkiye and ultimately extends to Europe. The first technical meeting of the working group on the draft Five-Party Cooperation Agreement of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor was held on 15 November 2014 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, with the participation of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. Subsequently, a second technical meeting held in December 2014 in Tbilisi, Georgia, finalized the Lapis Lazuli Corridor transit, trade, and transport agreement.

The Aqina Port is connected to Turkmenistan's railway network, serving as a crucial rail gateway between the two countries. The railway is being extended further into Afghanistan toward Andkhoy, representing a key element of the nation's broader railway infrastructure development strategy. The Torghundi port in Herat Province is also connected to Turkmenistan's railway network. Recently, Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Works announced that over

ninety-seven thousand metric tons of goods were transported via the country's railway network in a single week. Of this total, Aqina Port and Torghundi Port handled 13,000 and 10,000 metric tons, respectively. The newly operational Khaf-Herat railway line accounted for an additional 9,000 metric tons. However, the majority of the cargo, exceeding 68,000 metric tons, was transported through Hairatan Port, located on the northern border with Uzbekistan (Kabul Times, 2025). According to reports, Afghanistan's railway infrastructure currently extends over approximately 400 kilometers, encompassing both primary and secondary lines. These networks link four major border entry points—Hairatan, Aqina, Torghundi, and the Herat–Khaf corridor—with neighboring countries, including Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. The Ministry further reported that a memorandum of understanding valued at USD 500 million has been formalized with Kazakhstan to facilitate the construction of the Torghundi–Herat and Herat–Kandahar railway lines. Significantly, Uzbekistan has completed the survey of the 561-kilometer railway corridor connecting Balkh to Herat. The Ministry of Public Works has indicated that, upon implementation of these infrastructure projects and transit agreements—such as the “Afghan Trans” initiative—Afghanistan is poised to emerge as a critical regional transport hub.

It is also worth noting that Afghanistan can establish trade and transit relations with Kazakhstan, China, and Russia through the land borders of Turkmenistan. According to preliminary calculations, the delivery time for goods via the accelerated, uninterrupted route from Xi'an/Urumqi in China to Turgundi and Andkhoy in Afghanistan using the Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan–Afghanistan route will be reduced to just 10–12 days, at a cost significantly cheaper than alternative modes of transport. The Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan–Afghanistan corridor may also serve as a strategic transit route for the movement of goods from Russia and Belarus to markets in India and the Middle East.

In response to Pakistan's restrictions on Afghan trade and transit, Kabul has increasingly reoriented its food and energy security strategy toward Central Asia. While the majority of trade continues to flow

through the Hairatan port via the Uzbekistan corridor, the Turkmenistan route is rapidly gaining prominence as Afghanistan expands its imports of essential commodities, including flour, sugar, cooking oil, and fuel, through this channel.

### **Other trade and transit routes**

Other routes, such as the Tajikistan corridor, run through Sher Khan Bandar, which serves as the primary land port for trade and customs between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This route facilitates trade with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China. The proposed five-nation railway corridor passes through this route. Additionally, as noted earlier, Afghanistan conducts trade with Kyrgyzstan and China via alternative corridors passing through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

In parallel, efforts are underway to develop a new transport corridor aimed at establishing a direct connection between Afghanistan and China, with which Afghanistan shares a narrow border through the Wakhan Corridor. If realized, the Wakhan Corridor has the potential to significantly reshape Afghanistan's trade geography by enhancing its connectivity with China, the world's second-largest economy. At present, trade relations with China are conducted through Uzbekistan, with Chinese goods transported directly to Afghanistan's Hairatan port via existing railway connections. The development of the Wakhan Corridor has the potential to further enhance Afghanistan's export capacity during summer times.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Afghanistan's strategy for diversifying trade and transit routes is proving to be successful and is yielding positive results. The diversification strategy has finally come to fruition. Afghanistan has achieved significant progress in diversifying its trade and transit routes by establishing multiple axes of integration with neighboring and nearby countries in the areas of trade, transit, connectivity, cooperation, and economic integration. Afghanistan has ended its decades-long dependence on Pakistani routes and ports for trade and transit. Iranian routes and ports—particularly the Port of Chabahar—have emerged as viable alternatives to Pakistani routes and ports. Other alternatives

include routes through Central Asian countries, with the Uzbekistan corridor gaining particular prominence.

Afghanistan is continuing to connect the dots for trade, transit, connectivity, cooperation and integration in the region. The emergence of railway connectivity in Afghanistan is contributing to the integration of the country's previously unconnected or nearly non-existent rail lines, which were a result of the buffer-state mentality imposed by great powers in their great game. Afghanistan is undergoing a transition from an externally imposed buffer-state status toward the reestablishment of its historical role as a crossroads of major overland trade routes, through which goods, people, and ideas have historically moved in multiple directions. This was a role Afghanistan sustained for millennia, functioning as a central hub in a commercial network extending from Italy and Greece to China, India, and the Central Asian steppe. Rail transport has now become a high priority for the government of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan and the wider region have emerged from the era of the Great Game and are now independent states making their own decisions. Afghanistan, in particular, has regained sovereignty and is functioning as an independent country. Its balanced foreign policy doctrine is now guided by Islamic principles and adopts a positive, pragmatic approach. It maintains neutrality in the rivalry between great and regional powers and pursues an economy-centered foreign policy with full independence, aiming to strengthen bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in order to achieve a prosperous economy, independent trade, and overall economic development.

For Pakistan, it is important to recognize that trade cannot be politicized and that Pakistan's political independence should not be compromised. Trade and transit between neighbors are a win-win approach and are mutually beneficial. Rather than weaponizing its geography against Afghanistan, Pakistan could pursue a complementary approach, whereby both countries enhance their geographic positions as transit states connecting South Asia with Central Asia and vice versa. It is in the best interest of both countries to

resolve their differences through dialogue and diplomacy, with good intentions and strong will. Afghanistan has increasingly asserted its sovereignty and demonstrated resistance to external pressure or coercive practices. Should Pakistan persist with its obstructive policies, it is highly likely that Central Asian countries will endorse Iranian routes, including the Port of Chabahar, thereby bypassing Pakistan.

The region has deep structural problems and internal conflicts. Addressing these challenges requires a shift in perspective beyond a Eurocentric mentality and a more rational engagement with regional countries. The region needs to resolve its political, economic, and trade challenges independently. In this context, Uzbekistan can serve as a role model for the region.

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