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IRAN – AFGHANISTAN RAILWAY PROJECT RESUMED



*Train Holding an Iranian and Afghani Flag
Image Credit: Silk Road Briefing*

By Kevin Joyce, Middle East Desk

On Tuesday, March 8, the deputy head of the Iranian Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company, Abbas Khatibi, stated that talks with the Taliban about the Silk Road railway project have resumed. This comes shortly after the Taliban Ministry of Refugees and Repatriates stated 500,000 Afghans in exile in Iran, Pakistan, and other bordering regions, have returned to Afghanistan. Some Afghans migrating back into the country from Iran have stated they feel more secure in Afghanistan and are willing to work with the Taliban.

The Silk Road railway project was halted after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. After an Iranian delegation visited Kabul in mid-February 2022, both the Iranian delegation and the Taliban agreed to resume construction of this railway, and extend it further into Afghanistan's third largest city, Herat. This railway initiative would help reduce export and transit costs of goods and assist in the movement of refugees and travelers. This railway would also be a step forward in connecting Turkey with China to create an economic corridor in Asia.

We can estimate with high confidence that the Iranian-Taliban Silk Road project will not only alleviate major export and transit costs, but will also assist in the safer migration of Afghans to and from Iran, Uzbekistan, and other bordering countries. If the railway is completed, we also estimate with high confidence that Iranian-Afghan trade will increase significantly.

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Germany Commits €100 Billion to Defense Spending

By Brendan Valcone, Special Topics Desk

On Sunday, February 27, the German government announced it would prioritize military spending following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced this plan following a special meeting with the German parliament that took place in response to the Russian invasion.

In this recent plan, Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared that €100 billion of Germany's 2022 budget would include investments and armament projects for the German military. Scholz said that "It's clear we need to invest significantly more in the security of our country in order to protect our freedom and our democracy." He also reiterated his promise to reach the 2% goal of gross domestic spending on defense in line with NATO demands. These commitments have been made following former German defense leaders' disappointment about the military's readiness after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his intentions regarding Ukraine.

We can assess with high confidence that this spending increase is directly caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as pressure from NATO allies for Germany to increase its military contribution to the military alliance.



Chancellor Olaf Scholz
Image Credit: Reuters



SWIFT Logo
Image Credit: DW

Russian President Responds to Western Sanctions

By Sierra Mason, Europe Desk

On March 5, while speaking to a group of flight attendants at an Aeroflot training center near Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin described the Western sanctions imposed over the invasion of Ukraine as "akin to a declaration of war." Additionally, Putin warned that any attempt to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine would be seen as participation in the conflict and that such a step would have catastrophic consequences for Europe and the world.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, Western countries have imposed a number of sanctions aimed at isolating Moscow. This includes, but is not limited to, the freezing of Putin's foreign assets in the EU, US, UK, Switzerland, Japan, and Canada. Similar sanctions have been placed on Putin's inner circle. Russia's central bank has also been limited in accessing \$630bn of its reserves and a select number of its banks have been removed from the SWIFT international payment system, which will delay the payments the country receives for exports of oil and gas.

It can be stated with high confidence that these nations will continue to condemn Russia through actions such as sanctions amid the ongoing invasion.



Russian President, Vladimir Putin
Image Credit: BBC