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Silk Road is Soft Power for Expanding China

U.S. government and major American corporations are already on board.

By [Jon Basil Utley](#) • [November 9, 2017](#)



“One Belt, One Road.” Chinese international economic expansion.

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While Washington is seeking a pause in the rapid growth of its international trade, the rest of the world is moving full speed ahead. There is no better example than the fast developing New Silk Road, China’s vast project to facilitate its trade with Europe and connect Central Asia to the world economy.

At a recent conference in Washington hosted by [the Eurasia Center](#), speakers reported all sorts of information about the project.

Already since 2013 freight trains go from China’s mid-pacific coast to Poland in

12 days, less than half the time for cargo ships to Western Europe and much faster for inland Chinese factories such as major electronics ones, such as the American Hewlett Packard in Chongqing. It has opened up a new central Asian market for Polish agricultural exports. Even Italian wines and German cars are now going by rail to Asia. Train traffic has more than doubled during the last year to some [45-50 trains per month](#). Traffic will take even fewer days if the Chinese region follows through with eventual plans for [high-speed rail connections](#). *Businessweek's* China-sponsored "Focus Report" states that 32 Chinese cities now have 52 China-Europe rail lines connecting to 12 European countries.

More importantly, it is facilitating trade between central Asian nations as well as with the outside world. The silk road is a network of railroads, pipelines, highways, and ports bringing all of Central Asia—even including Turkey, Iran and the "stans"—into close commercial contact with China as well as among themselves.

Many of the projects are gaining funding from China's [Asian Infrastructure Development Bank](#) (AIIB). The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Michell Small, director of its office in North America, said that it had already funded some \$13 billion of projects. She said that the bank also offers help for American investors with projects in the region. Bart Edes of the Asian Development Bank, which also makes large loans for Silk Road projects, stressed the new cooperation between affected nations wanting fast progress. Firouz Rooyani of Tetra Tech in California discussed his company's energy projects and explained how the World Bank's "Doing Business Index" had great influence encouraging central Asian nations to modernize and rationalize their bureaucratic, formerly stifling government ministries.

Xiaochen Chen of China's Renmin University stated that there were many opportunities for U.S. contractors with knowledge and experience in high-end construction technology. Eric Rudenshiold, senior officer in charge for Central Asia for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), said that Washington now supports the Silk Road development agenda to bring prosperity to Central Asia. Formerly Washington had held back its support in fear of China's growing influence and power. Andrey Bondarev, chief of the Economic Section of the Russian Embassy in Washington, explained how Russia's new, giant ice breakers were facilitating natural gas drilling in the Arctic for more energy resources for Japan and China. Silk Road trains connect in Moscow for transport to Northern Europe. Anthony Livanios of [Energy Stream](#) described

how new gas pipelines already under construction would be reaching Europe through Turkey, Greece, and Southern Italy. His group sponsors yearly gas and pipeline conferences in Europe and Washington.

Another aspect of the Silk Road is bringing cheap nuclear power to desert bound cities and provinces. New forms of nuclear power generation are being created: [using thorium instead of uranium](#) is much safer and prevents runaway nuclear reactions. There are myriad new ways of safer construction than the 45-year-old technology of the Japanese plant damaged at Fukushima in 2011. (Even there, no one died of radiation from the accident, while 1700 died from the government's panicked evacuation.)

A [Chinese factory is already producing](#) a new, small-scale nuclear modular reactor (SMR) for use in isolated regions. The [Financial Times calls SMRs](#) the wave of the future. They can be transported by truck or rail and would eventually cost less than a tenth the price of conventional reactors. Another speaker, Andrew David Paterson of Verdigris Capital, LLC, said that China already has plans [to build some 60 nuclear plants](#), of which 80 percent would be in Asia. Nuclear technology is expected to become China's second most high-tech exported item, following high-speed rail. The [MIT Technology Review explains](#) Chinese progress and how, in the U.S., the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) stifles new technology and construction with its bureaucratic morass. [The Washington Examiner](#) also has reported on similar incompetence at the NRC. Thus, China is charging ahead while America is unable to build infrastructure and compete abroad, strangled by Washington's alphabet soup of inbred agencies. Years of permitting and lawsuits are sometimes necessary just to rebuild an old bridge.

There are many examples of how Washington handicaps American businesses. High corporate taxes are not just on American businesses. They are also imposed upon American executives and engineers who work abroad. No other major nation taxes its citizens on foreign income while living and working overseas. The Environmental Protection Agency [under Obama became a job preventer and job killer](#). I have written much about how it virtually shut down the opening of new mines and industries based on its [false science of linear no threshold modeling](#). The Nuclear Regulatory Commission used this EPA "science" when it warned Americans to stay 50 miles away from the stricken Fukushima plant, where no neighboring civilians died or were even sickened from radiation.

America is strangled by the processes and unending lawsuits filed to delay or prevent rebuilding of infrastructure. We should focus on reforming these issues

rather than blaming our deficits and slow growth on foreign trade and international competition.

Equally, I often think that for the cost of our unending, useless wars against Muslim nations, we too could have new highways, canals and high-speed rail all over our nation too.

The New Silk Road is a shining symbol of the dynamism of China. Its vast push to commercialize central Asia is expected to become the greatest public works project in history.

U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Robert Cekuta ended the conference with a strongly worded endorsement of the New Silk Road's objectives: the prosperity brought about by enhanced trade, education and interaction of peoples along its routes, increased access to information, and a broader worldview more resistant to the poison of extremism. He concluded, "A safer, more secure, more prosperous world with more diversified energy and trade routes... will enable U.S. companies to compete and thrive in new marketplaces."

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