

Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road or Zone of Dark Age Chaos

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Many voices have been quick to enter the chorus of commentators hypothesizing the manifold possible causes of the devastating explosions which occurred on the afternoon of August 4 in Beirut which has led to mass anarchy and the surprising [resignation of the government on August 11th](#).

While I have no great novel contribution to offer in that growing array of hypotheses (which are slowly turning into noise), I would like to share an insight which addresses a too-often-overlooked aspect of the role of Lebanon in the Great Game. Before proceeding, it is useful to hold in the mind several points of certainty:

- 1) The official narrative of a chance mishap of Turkish fireworks instigating the detonation of the 2700 tons of ammonium nitrate which had been sitting at the Port of Beirut for six years is entirely unbelievable.
- 2) This event should not be considered in any way separated from the anomalously large pattern of explosions and arson which have spread across the Arab and African worlds in recent weeks.
- 3) This pattern of chaos must itself be seen in the context of the clash between two systems: The collapsing NATO unipolar alliance on the one side and the New Silk Road-led multipolar alliance on the other.

The Matter of Causality

The Middle East has been labelled the “geopolitical pivot” of the world island by devout adherents to the Hobbesian worldview of Halford Mackinder such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger and Bernard Lewis. Today it is understood that whomever can either stabilize or destabilize this region can control the levers for the “world island” (Africa, Europe, and Eurasia)... and as Mackinder once said “who controls the world island, controls the world.”

In the case of Lebanon, the role that this region plays as “Pearl on the New Silk Road”, and intersection of all major civilizations of the globe, has shaped global policy considerations in Washington, London and Israel for the past several years. The destructive events underway in Lebanon cannot be separated from the [breathtaking spread of Belt and Road projects](#) across Iraq, Iran, Syria and other Arab nations.

More than Coincidence

In the weeks surrounding the Lebanon disaster, Iran found herself the target of a vicious sequence of attacks as arson and explosions were unleashed beginning with the June 26 explosion at the Khojir Missile production complex, the June 30 explosion at a medical clinic killing 19, a July 2 explosion at the Natanz nuclear facility which set Iran's centrifuge production schedule [back by months](#) and the July 15 fires at the Bushehr Aluminum plant. Additionally, and the UAE experienced its own anomalous fires which ravaged one of the most important markets in Dubai (luckily empty due to Covid-19) on August 5.

If any of these anomalies were taken individually, "chance" could always be blamed as culprit. However when one takes them all together and recognizes the revolutionary BRI-connected agreements currently being finalized between both China and Russia with Iran does one get a solid idea of the deeper causality underlying these apparently separate situations of chaos.

Iran and the New Silk Road

The fact is that the long awaited [\\$400 billion China-Iran economic and security pact](#) which is in its final stages of negotiation includes not only important oil for infrastructure agreements which will extend advanced rail and new energy grids to Iran. This program also includes an important military/security partnership which will dramatically transform the "rules of the game" in the middle east for generations. Elements of this pact include not only defense and intelligence sharing infrastructure, but also also bolster China's new digital currency the e-RMB which will circumvent western controls on trade.

Meanwhile Russia's announced [extension of the 20 year security/economic partnership](#) agreement first signed in 2001 by Presidents Rouhani and Putin will certainly be finalized in the coming months. Iran has also made it's interests in [acquiring Russia's S400 system](#) well known and all geopoliticians understand well that this system which is spreading fast across all of Eurasia from Turkey to South Korea renders America's F-35s and THAAD missile systems impotent and obsolete.

If the China-Russia-Iran triangle can be firmly established, then not only does America's sanctions regime policy disintegrate, but a vital platform of Middle Eastern development will be established to better spearhead the growth of transport and advanced development corridors from China to the east (and Africa) along the New Silk Road. Since November 2018 an [Iran-Iraq-Syria railway](#) has taken great strides towards implementation as part of middle east reconstruction funded by Iran and ultimately connecting to Syria's Lattakia Port as a hub to the Mediterranean and a 32km Shalamchah-Bashra railway is in an advanced phase of development with Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Ahmad [stating](#):

"Iran's railway system is linked to railways of central Asia, China and Russia and if the 32 km Shalamchah-Basra railway will be constructed, Iraq can transfer goods and passengers to Russia and China and vice versa."

While the 32 km rail line would be phase one, the 2nd phase is scheduled to be a 1545 km rail and highway to the Syrian Port.

The Iran-Iraq-Syria regional participation in the broader New Silk Road is incredibly important, especially since Iraq signed a [September 2019 Memorandum of Understanding to](#)

[join the BRI](#) under a new infrastructure-for-oil program. This plan involves China's reconstruction of the war-torn region under a multiphase program of hard infrastructure (rail, roads, energy and water projects), and soft infrastructure (hospitals, schools and cultural centers).

Similarly, China has made it intention to bring real reconstruction programs to Syria are also well known and President Bashar Al Assad's [long overdue Four Seas Strategy](#) first announced in 2004 (and sabotaged with the Arab Spring) is finally coming back on line. President Assad had won 7 countries over to sign onto it's construction by 2010 and entailed connecting all four major water systems (Mediterranean, Caspian, Black Sea, and Persian Gulf) together via rail and infrastructure corridors as a driver for win-win cooperation and regional modernization. Assad had said of the project in 2009 *"once we link these four seas, we become the unavoidable intersection of the whole world in investment, transport and more."*

A fuller video of this important project can be viewed here:

Lebanon: Pearl of the New Silk Road

Lebanon's participation in this long-awaited process should be obvious to all, sharing as it does a major border with Syria, hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees and also a vital port to the Mediterranean making it a keystone of east-west development. Connecting this emerging zone of development to Africa where the Belt and Road has emerged as a leading force of change and hope in recent years, Lebanon finds itself among the most strategic keystones.

Designs for rail connecting [Lebanon's Port of Tripoli](#) through Jordan and thence through Egypt would be create a new positive field of prosperity which could dramatically change the rules of the Middle East and Africa forever.

On June 17, 2020 the Chinese Embassy publicized an offer to extend BRI projects to Lebanon featuring a modern railway connecting coastal cities in the north with Tripoli through Beirut to Naqura in the south. China's National Machinery IMP/EXP Corporation also offered the construction of three new power plants of 700 MW each, a new national energy grid and port modernization. The Embassy's press release stated:

"The Chinese side is ready to carry out practical cooperation actively with the Lebanese side on the basis of equality and mutual benefit in the framework of joint work to build the Belt and Road... China is committed to cooperation with other nations mainly through the role of its companies, the leading role of the market, and the catalytic role of government and commercial operation. Chinesees companies continue to follow with interest the opportunities of cooperation in infrastructure and other fields in Lebanon."

These offers were applauded by Hassan Nasrallah (leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah and partner in the coalition government) who had been an outspoken advocate of Lebanon's participation in the BRI for years. Nasrallah has also advocated [liberating Lebanon from the IMF](#) whose structural adjustments and conditionality-laden investments have resulted in the small country's debt exploding to over 170% of its GDP with nothing to show for it.



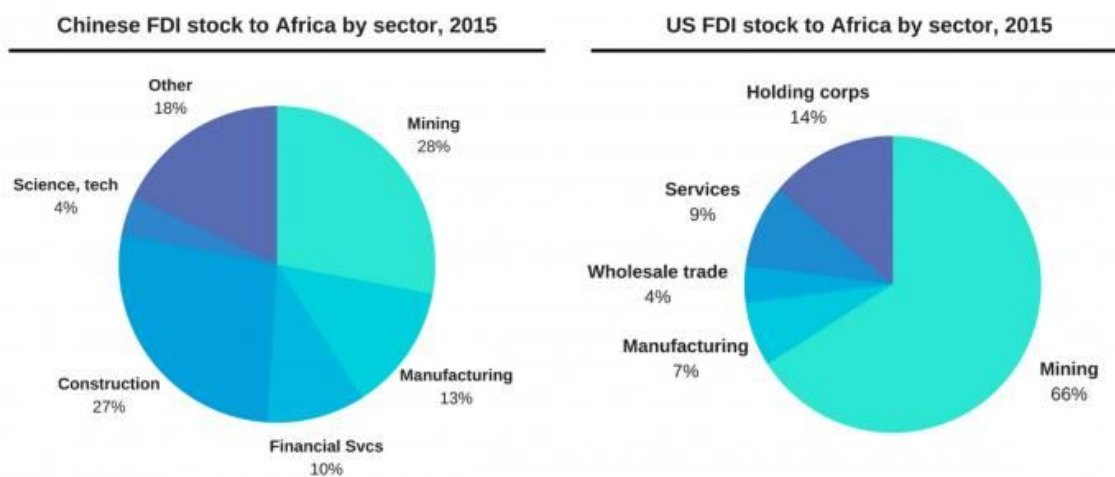
It is noteworthy that the same day China made its offers known publicly, Washington imposed the *Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act* to punish all who wish to trade with Syria which itself has not only further crushed Syria's cries for economic reconstruction, but had taken direct aim at Lebanon which sees 90% of Syrian goods flow through its borders to the Mediterranean.

When Chinese delegations first made their vision for the [BRI's extension to Lebanon known in March 2019](#) where the Arab Highway from Beirut to Damascus and rail to China was floated, western stooge Saad Al Hariri said no, preferring instead to sign onto a \$10 billion IMF plan. Over a year later, not one iota of infrastructure was built. Secretary of State Pompeo played a major role at keeping Lebanon from "going east" as Nasrallah and even President Aoun had desired when he stated [in a March 2019 press conference](#) "Lebanon and the Lebanese people face a choice: bravely move forward as an independent and proud nation or allow the dark ambitions of Iran and Hezbollah to dictate your future."

Pompeo's obsessive drive to eliminate Hezbollah and especially the influence of Nasrallah in Lebanon has less to do with any perceived threat Israel claims to its existence and everything with Hezbollah and Iran's embrace of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

When Chinese offers were renewed in June 2020, Pompeo's stooge David Schenker (Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs) gave a [June 23 interview](#) stating that Hezbollah "is not an organization that seeks reform, but rather one that lives on corruption". Schenker warned Lebanon from falling into the "China Trap" and said that Nasrallah's demands that Lebanon "look east" was "shocking".

Without going into a lengthy refutation of the "China debt trap" argument (which is really just the effect of western imperialists projecting their own dirty practices onto China's BRI), it is sufficient to say that it is a 100% myth. A summary overview of Chinese investments in Africa which are numerically similar to American investments demonstrates that the difference is found entirely in QUALITY as China uniquely invests in real construction, manufacturing and even African banking which are verboten by all imperialists who only wish to use Africa as a looting ground for cheap resources and cheaper labor.



Source: SAIS-CARI analysis, based on data from: UNCTAD Bilateral FDI Statistics; China Statistical Yearbook; Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment; Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce.

Speaking to this issue, and the hope for Lebanon more broadly the [BRIX Sweden's Hussein Askary stated](#):

“It is becoming obvious that a tiny country like Lebanon, but fully sovereign and independent can break the back of a global empire by opting to follow the path of progress, national sovereignty and international cooperation according to the win-win model offered by China. This does not mean cutting all bridges to the west. It is necessary to keep those that are in the true interest of Lebanon and its people. If the U.S. and Europe wish to change their policies and join China in offering Lebanon power, transport, water and agro-industrial investments, the Lebanese people and leadership would take them with open arms”.

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