

Battery technologies afghanistan

The lithium-ion battery story begins with chemistry and ends with innovation. While the media is focusing on OPEC and the oil price at the pump, lithium is reaching its highs, reflecting interest in the mineral, as oil prices remain volatile. Since the 2010 revelation that Afghanistan's deposits are full of the precious metal, the country arouses all desires as China, India and Japan complicate the situation in the region.

Given the strong localization of global production, the price pressure could be accentuated by an inclination to cartelize production between Argentina, Bolivia and Chile that control alone, nearly 85% of production.

While Goldman Sachs predicts a tripling of the lithium market by 2025, a race to secure supplies is taking place: Chile, which holds nearly a third of global reserves of lithium, has launched a vast program allowing foreign operators, including vehicle manufacturers, to engage in exploration and production of this metal. Proof of the geopolitical importance of this mineral, Bolivia seeks, on the other hand, to take only the production of lithium carbonate and lithium metal.

Also, if a continuation of the upward trend of lithium prices is likely to surge, it should not obscure a key question and yet often overlooked when treating raw material: that of price volatility. Possible financializing of the lithium market run, fueled by investors seeking higher returns and uncorrelated to traditional financial assets, may likely exacerbate price movements, which inevitably penalize the real economy. Yet there is, to date, no financial market to manage risks associated with them.

If Afghanistan engages further in the lithium sector, it would also create jobs in a region plagued by unemployment which, according to the World Bank, increased to 40 percent in 2015 from 25 percent in 2014. The value of newly discovered mineral deposits would exceed the size of the current Afghan economy, undermined by the parallel economy coming from opium production and trafficking of narcotics, and based primarily today on the assistance of foreign government and other industrialized countries. The gross domestic product of Afghanistan would be only 12 billion dollars.

It is a double-edged situation though, as the lust of the mines could indeed motivate the Taliban to regain control of the country and the expected peace would give way to the redoubled strength of fighting.

The next few years look like a dicey rock climb for Afghanistan as it has no industry or mining infrastructure. Only one road is connecting north to south. According to U.S. officials, it would thus take decades before the country can actually use these resources. The war -- and the fragility of the Afghan institutions -- also make it difficult to implement a successful mining policy in the long term. But such discovery could affect conflicts: the neighboring regional powers in Afghanistan -- China, India, Russia -- could suddenly see a strategic interest.

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