

China Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Challenge or Opportunity for India

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ABSTRACT

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship of China's One Belt One Road initiative is pivotal to China's energy security. However CPEC could bring big economic avenues for Pakistan and can promote economic integration between South, Central, East and West Asia. This project can open up new opportunities for the people living in backward and under developed regions. In this paper the author tried to sort out the challenges and opportunities for India out of this project and an attempt has been made to show benefits in cooperation for both India and Pakistan from this project. The challenges which can't be sub-sided also form an important part of this paper.

Keywords: *Challenge, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, One Belt One Road, Prospect, Silk Road.*

INTRODUCTION

Regional integration is a process of upgrading cooperation among different states through common institutions and rules. The objectives of cooperation could range from economic and political to environmental issues, although it has typically taken the shape of a political economy initiative where commercial interests are the focus for achieving broader socio-political and security objectives. The countries remove the barriers for free trade and movement of people across national borders, with the goal of reducing the tensions that can lead to international conflict. The most reliable path to inter-state integration is to establish a frame work for coordination and cooperation, for mutual benefits. The Multi-dimensional interaction in domains of economic, political, social, cultural and security cooperation transcends traditional forms of free-trade regimes or security alliances. Regional integration initiatives, according to Van Langenhove, should fulfil at least eight important functions: a). strengthening of trade integration in the region; b). creation of an appropriate enabling environment for private sector development; c). development of infrastructure programmes in support of economic growth and regional integration; d). development of strong public sector institutions and good governance; e). reduction of social exclusion and the development of an inclusive civil society; f). contribution to peace and security in the region; g). building of environment programmes at the regional level; h). strengthening of the region's interaction with other regions of the world.^[1] The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a programme of regional integration, which is expected to benefit China and Pakistan but created serious concern in India. The paper has focussed on the Indian concerns and opportunities, as if the challenges may be addressed through dialogue and cooperation, the project may prove beneficial for India as well. The revival of Kargil-Iskardu-Gilgit route and Bandipora-Gurais-Gilgit road may help in this endeavour as both these links reached to Gilgit, which has been linked with Karakoram Highway.

II. ONE BELT ONE ROAD INITIATIVE

The 'Silk Route' is now renewed in new fashion with new interest and loyalties and it is expected to play a major role in the regional cooperation. The global economic crisis and domestic social problems made China to find new export markets or preserve existing ones, narrow development gaps between the well-developed coastal areas and the less-developed inland parts of the country and preserve stability inside China and its neighbourhood. Consequently the Chinese leaders coined the slogan a 'New Silk Road'. The 'New Silk Road' concept consists of a 'new Silk Road economic belt', which indicates stronger economic relations with South and Central Asia with a special focus on trade. The Chinese leaders proposed to build 'New Silk Road Economic Belt' jointly to strengthen relations between China, Central Asia and Europe, as it would lead to strengthen communication, which may help 'switch on a green light' for joint economic cooperation, strengthen road connections, with the idea to establish a great transport corridor from the Pacific to the Baltic Sea, and from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean, then gradually build a network of transport connections between eastern, western and southern Asia, strengthen trade facilitation, with a focus on eliminating trade barriers and taking steps to reduce trade and investment expenses, strengthen monetary cooperation, with special attention to currency settlements that could decrease transaction costs and lessen financial risk while increasing economic competitiveness, and strengthen people-to-people relations.^[2] This initiative on the part of President of China, Xi Jinping in 2013 to draw an increasingly overt link between domestic and foreign affairs, more often referred as 'One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative.'^[3]

'Belt and Road' is a concept, aims to increase connectivity to enhance trade flows and spur long-term regional economic growth and development, benefiting all those involved. At the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference, Xi rightly put forth that China's neighbours had 'extremely significant strategic value.' He further said that he wanted to improve relations between China and its neighbours, strengthening economic ties and deepening security cooperation. 'Maintaining stability in China's neighbourhood is the key objective of peripheral diplomacy. We must encourage and participate in the process of regional economic integration, speed up the process of building up infrastructure and connectivity. We must build the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, creating a new regional economic order.'^[4] Although a few sections of the New Silk Road are in place or under construction but most only exist on the drawing board. Nonetheless, this vision of inter-linkage is beginning to catch the attention of the international community. Most of the people like Governments, businesses, and citizens along the proposed routes have been attracted by the huge amount of finance that Beijing will allocate and raised to make the vision a reality. However, they are also wary of the geopolitical implications of becoming a node in these China orientated routes of connectivity.^[5] The regional development aspect of 'one belt one road' is China's most important economic policy objectives.^[6]

Central Asia being a part of Muslim world with which Beijing was much interested to build a privileged partnership. Thus Central Asia was a part of China's strategy for consolidating its long-standing alliance with Pakistan, and of building a long-term partnership with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.^[7] Central Asia also embodies a new relationship between China and India, comprising both patterns of competition and cooperation.^[8] Beijing has been carrying out enormous investments for building pipelines and transportation routes (New Silk Route), and intensifying cooperation in the cultural sphere, so as to break the Russian

monopoly. China had also been cooperating with Central Asian nations in the security sphere, including cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) framework, small weapons sale, limited military assistance for the region (financial and technical, including weapons), agreements on cooperation in the spheres of security and combating terrorism, training soldiers and officers of the region's national armies (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).^[9] 'One belt one road' has been also expected to play an important role in revitalising economically underperforming provinces in the north-east as well as other poor regions in the southwest, bordering Southeast Asia.^[10]

III. CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a mega project of 'One Road One Belt Initiative.' The Idea of China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) was visualized by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in 2013, during his visit to Pakistan. Later this project got a proper shape in the Chinese President XI's visit in 2015 to Pakistan.^[11] The CPEC connects Kashgar with the port of Gwadar in the Southwest via Khunjarab Pass across the Karakorum Range traversing about 3,000 kilometres. China plans to invest around US\$46 billion in development deals over the next 10 to 15 years, equivalent to about 20 percent of Pakistan's annual GDP. Out of it around \$34 billion will be invested in the energy sector to improve Pakistan's energy-system capacity by adding about 7,000 megawatts of electricity generation to the national grid. The remaining \$12 billion will be devoted to infrastructure, transport, and communication, including upgrading of railway line between Karachi and Peshawar.^[12] The major routes in this project include, western route which runs through Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces via Turbat, Panjgur, Qalat, Quetta, Zhob, Dera Ismail Khan and then to Havelian. This route can be linked to Afghanistan and Iran through Chaman and Taftan, respectively.^[13] The eastern route originates from Gwadar and runs through mainly Sindh and Punjab via Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkhar, Rahimyar Khan, Multan, and then Havelian. The central route criss-crosses the country from Gwadar until Havelian via different cities of Baluchistan, Sindh, and Punjab provinces, including Khuzdar, Sukkhar, D.G. Khan, Mianwali, and Taxila. An extension from Taxila via Peshawar and Torkham will eventually connect Jalalabad in Afghanistan. From Havelian, a northern route that is common to all connects Kashgar via Karakorum Highway.^[14] Besides these physical links, the official and stakeholders have identified over 40 sites from Khunjarab to Gwadar for establishing Special Economic Zones and industrial parks along the CPEC routes. These zones are expected to encourage foreign investment and boost the industrialization process by helping to generate local employment.^[15] Gwadar port holds the central place this project as the port would only enable the project to become an energy corridor.^[16]

IV. PROSPECTS OF CPEC FOR CHINA AND PAKISTAN

The CPEC is strategically and economically very significant both for China and Pakistan as the project has potential to further strength relationship between China and Pakistan, economically and socially. This project can change the geo-politics of South Asia. The CPEC could serve as driving force for trade and economic integration between China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States provided the frosty political atmosphere between Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Iran gets improved in the near future. Under this

project US\$ 10 billion will be spent to rejuvenate Pakistan's dilapidated communication and infrastructure, overcome energy crisis. The CPEC connects China directly to the Indian Ocean and the region of the Middle East from the deep Gwadar Port reducing its dependence on the South China Sea as it is becoming a contested territory between various regional and global actors and can be choked any time by the competing powers in the Asia-Pacific region. The CPEC trade route will reduce the existing maritime distance of 12,000 kilometres between Beijing and Persian Gulf by shrinking it to a 3000 kilometre land route from Kashgar to Gwadar.^[17] The new routes will enable China to import oil from the Middle East and Africa in 10 days as opposed to 45 days shipping time.^[18] The project is expected to reduce the transportation costs to 1/3rd and China can save about US\$6 million every day, amounting to \$2 billion for one year, even if it uses the CPEC route for only 50% of its oil imports.^[19] China can also address the internal security problems in Xinjiang through economic development as Gwadar is closest sea port to the landlocked western region, and China realizes that substantial investment and trade will promote economic growth and stability, thus alleviating socio-economic disparity in the region.^[20] Besides peace and economic stability in the Xinjiang, Gwadar port offers Beijing an advantageous position in the energy rich Caspian Region. The corridor provides an important trade route for linking Xinjiang to the energy rich Central Asian states through Gwadar port for energy and trade exchange.^[21] CPEC is also very much important to Pakistan for moving out of the economic stagnation as this project (US\$46 billion) offers a special opportunity to Pakistan to address some of the main road-blocks to its economic growth like energy crisis, poor communication infrastructure, and less foreign investment. There is a broad consensus across the society in Pakistan on the enormous potential of CPEC for promoting economic growth in the country.^[22] The persistent energy crisis in Pakistan affects the overall economic growth of the nation. The energy shortage causes a loss of about 2% of GDP annually.^[23] The establishment of new power plants with US\$34 billion will also revive existing industry such as textile and agricultural activity and thus can contribute for alleviating the strained socio-economic conditions of the people.^[24] It has been expected that Chinese investments will boost Pakistan's \$274 billion GDP by over 15 %. The project will prove a game changer and will make China a real stakeholder in Pakistan's stability and security. In fact, it is a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan.

Pakistan would also benefit from the Special Economic Zones to be established along the planned routes. These Special Economic Zones could become competing places for manufactured goods, agriculture, and the services sector. Likewise, by drawing investments into more export-oriented industries and internationally competitive manufactured goods, Pakistan will be able to turn the existing trade deficit in its favour. As CPEC routes pass through the backward and remote areas, especially Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan, would receive progressive development. The mining industry of Baluchistan can grow as Baluchistan is rich in mineral resources. Likewise, the region of Gilgit-Baltistan known for its fresh fruits, such as cherries, apples, and apricots, would be able to export the perishable items by making use of the upgraded transport infrastructure. Similarly, development of the infrastructure will help boost the tourism sector.^[25] Promotion of socio-economic development through this project would bring peace and stability to the Pakistan in general and specifically to the restive and backward province of Baluchistan, making it economically viable and sustainable. The separatist groups in Baluchistan have been using resource exploitation and deprivation slogans as a major tool for mobilising public support for sub-nationalism. The development of communication infrastructure will

facilitate the socio-economic development of the local people by supporting medium and small sized industries. This boost promises to reduce unemployment and improve the literacy rate and living conditions of the local populace.^[26]

Pakistan could play a pivotal role for regional trade due to its geo-strategic location. Situated at the crossroads of supplying and consuming markets of the oil rich Middle East, the states of the Central Asia Republics (CAR), and China. The CPEC offers the best opportunity for Pakistan to grow its trade with Central and South Asia, including India. Besides serving as a gateway and thus realizing huge transit revenues, Pakistan can fulfil its energy needs from resource rich Central Asia via Afghanistan. Similarly, through improved infrastructure, this project can provide landlocked countries the shortest access in comparison to Iran and Turkey, for transport their goods and power resources to the regional and world markets. In this way, CPEC will promote regional economic and trade connectivity as envisaged by its creators.^[27] Thus, CPEC, which is a bilateral agreement at the moment, has the potential to become a multilateral project as the corridor has the prospective road extensions to link Afghanistan, Iran, and India for regional integration.

V.CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND INDIA

India's is seriously concerned over CPEC as one section of this corridor runs through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India identifies as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir which India claims as part of its territory). India claims that Pakistan Administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan still a disputed area and part of the Indian Administered Kashmir i.e. Jammu and Kashmir, and therefore, denies Pakistan control over it.^[28] India fears that to provide the CPEC project with legal cover, Pakistan is looking to upgrade the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan and legally admit the region as the fifth province of Pakistan. Although Pakistan has not yet affirmed the legal integration of Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan but such statements have been jotted by the people on helm of affairs.^[29] Moreover, India views Chinese firms' involvement in development projects in the Pakistan administered Kashmir as Chinese support of Pakistan's claim on the territory. Thus, India is worried that this project in Gilgit-Baltistan will give legitimacy to Pakistan's control over this areas. Indian analysts also claim that several thousand Chinese personnel working on these projects belong to the engineering corps of the People's Liberation Army. India views the presence of these personnel as another potential military threat to India's security interests and considers it as a Chinese expansionist agenda in the region.^[30] India views the project, especially Gwadar port, with suspicion in regards to its effect on the maritime balance of power in the Indian Ocean.^[31] India also fears that China wants access to the hot water of Indian Ocean to take control of the trade routes and South and Central Asia energy resources. China can also use the Gwadar Port as a naval base to contain Indian influence in this region. Chinese investment in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal increase Indian concerns.^[32] Moreover, India fears the encirclement of India by the so-called 'string of pearls' strategy,^[33] through China's involvement in the development of a series of strategic naval ports in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh.^[34] China's proceedings and objectives in this direction are seen as, a deliberate attempt to encircle India.^[35] Parallel to the CPEC project, China has assured Pakistan of a supply of eight submarines-around US\$4 billion to \$5 billion in military hardware.^[36] India's fear of isolation and growing Chinese influence in Pakistan and its desire to

control Central Asia, has driven India to strive to extend its own sphere of influence in this region. As a result, India is investing in Iran's port of Chabahar, west of Gwadar port,^[37] and plans to build a north-south corridor through Iran and Afghanistan. India was much interested to have a transit route to Afghanistan and Central Asia via Pakistan. However, political rivalry kept them away from one another and consequently Pakistan has denied transit route to India through its territory. As an alternative India focused on Chabahar Port in Iran to access Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran reducing its long lasting dependence on Pakistan to access Central Asia. India, Iran and Afghanistan have recently inaugurated the Chabahar Port under the trilateral frame work clear indications for bypassing Pakistan for a regional trade connection between the three countries.

However, the opportunities of cooperation outweigh the challenges for South Asian nations. Regional cooperation is pivotal for enhancing economic growth and development of individual countries in South Asia and these countries could achieve stability and prosperity. South Asia has great economic strength in terms of its market potential, rich natural resources and human capital.^[38] Economic cooperation facilitates growth and development, which in turn promotes social welfare, reduce poverty, raise income and improve the welfare of poor and increase resources available for social security, primary health care, education, and other basic services. India and Pakistan can get benefits from both projects (CPEC and Chabahar) in cooperation not in dissociation. Pakistan can also be part of Chabahar trilateral arrangement and both Gwadar and Chabahar ports could be linked as regional ports fostering regional trades.^[39] Cooperation in one dimension may have spill-over effects on other aspect, which can be beneficial for the welfare of people. The TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) gas pipeline agreement signed in December 2015 between India, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan signifies the melting of the long existing cold attitude and trust deficit between India and Pakistan and Pakistan and Afghanistan. The concept of TAPI was an old one but couldn't get materialize due to the political rivalry between these states.^[40] Chinese foreign official Cheng Feng reported: 'The CPEC is neither a way to achieve political aims nor to be used in regional conflicts. Basic aim of the economic plan is to expand the mutual relations. China wants to engage other countries in the economic corridor too.' He further said, 'we rather view CPEC as a way of forming equal relationships with regional countries and to promote friendship and neighbourhood in the region.'^[41] India is in need of a transit route to trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia via Pakistan and Pakistan desires access to the markets of Central Asian Republics for its energy needs. Pakistan's access to Central Asia is much difficult unless and until Pakistan allows Afghanistan the transit route to access India. The CPEC seems to be an opportunity for India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian States to have North-South regional trade connectivity in addition to creating economic avenues for Pakistan. Thus India's inclusion to CPEC can be mutually beneficial move for regional cooperation and trust.^[42] China can facilitate cooperation as Beijing also believed that the two neighbours (India and Pakistan) should solve their dispute through dialogue and consultations and it has repeatedly emphasised that the construction of CPEC would not affect its stance on the issue.^[43] Making India's inclusion to the CPEC will be helpful to allay the doubts between India and China toward each other's move in the region. The joint security of the CPEC between China, Pakistan and India can usher a new economic beginning in the region and can bring the countries more close. The trilateral (China, Pakistan and India) cooperation could on a large scale help in controlling violent incidents in the volatile regions of these states. China has already indicated that CPEC is not a bilateral move, rather a regional and cross regional move. In this endeavour of cooperation and

regional integration Jammu and Kashmir could act as a bridge as the revival of Cross-LoC routes, Kargil-Iskardu-Gilgit and Bandipora-Gurais-Gilgit, between India and Pakistan can become economic corridor of Karakoram Highway.

VI. CONCLUSION

India-Pakistan relations remained strained since Partition in 1947, however, due to globalization, regional and economic integration besides immense internal and external pressure, the two countries tread the path of reshaping their relation through the dialogue. The composite dialogue process started in 2004, as a mutual *detente*, and in 2005, both countries pursued people-centric policy which led to the re-opening of Cross-LoC trade and travel routes. They reiterated to sustain normalization of relations on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and non-interference, and reaffirmed to reopen above routes for regular trade and traffic. However, the said process was jolted by the number of factors including mass uprising in Kashmir valley and the peace process automatically took a back seat. However, restoration of dialogue process between India and Pakistan will help in resolving different perception on CPEC and possibility for consensus may be there. The re-opening of Kargil-Iskardu-Gilgit and Bandipora-Gurais-Gilgit routes further increase chances for cooperation on this project. The revival of Silk road outweigh costs and ensure multifarious advantages to the concerned stake holders especially India, Pakistan and Central Asia in terms of regional peace, security and development. The revival can contribute to multi-layered benefits through interdependence and greater interaction at the people's level which, in turn, would marginalize India-Pakistan decade-old enmity as a key to economic upliftment of their nationals.

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