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**GEO-ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF THE CHINA PAKISTAN
ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND ITS REGIONAL
IMPLICATIONS**

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Abstract

In a zero-sum environment, the power and role of a state is considerably impacted by its location that helps to settle social, economic, and political affairs of the world. Pakistan's location is very important. On one side, it shares its boundaries with world two big economies i.e., China and India. On the other side, it has access to world's oil and gas enriched countries (Iran and Central Asian Republics). CPEC is a multibillion project, that is a step towards close relations between China and Pakistan and to bring together South and East Asian Nations to cooperate and collaborate in terms of trade, currency, culture exchange, energy, and infrastructure. Pakistan is sandwiched between two blocs of states. One bloc possesses vast energy resources whereas the other has the need of energies for their growing economies. Hence, CPEC has the potential to connect Pakistan, China, Iran, India, Afghanistan, and Central Asian Republics and further Russia and Europe. In such scenario, the role of Gwadar port is very significant. It is this significance that gives CPEC a buckling status that buckles all the Belt and Road Corridors. Therefore, the project is in turn a reshaping of Super Pangaea in partial economically, politically, and socially. The research attempts to explore the geo-strategic importance of CPEC.

Keywords: CPEC, Pakistan, China, Geostrategic, BRI, Geopolitics

Introduction

In the current scenario, the nations of the world are getting closer to each other in order to take advantage of each other resources, influences and

political power. This cooperation is tantamount to regionalism. In the past, European Union was patterned on the basis of regional cooperation and became an example for regional cooperation and assistance. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a leap forward in this type of cooperation. The project is a part of corridors in Built and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI comprises of six corridors, engaging 144 countries around the world. It will engage 4.4 billion population of the world. CPEC buckles all the other corridors. The purpose of corridors is to connect the nations and their markets and to facilitate the movement of goods and services to and from. This provides states an opportunity to reach the resources and expertise of one another and reduce their dependency upon the regions outside. To see how economic corridors have been designed in the past, they usually build infrastructures and transport goods across the target markets. The corridor provides bases for an economic and social development links among the participating nations. Hence, the purpose is largely economic growth, social development and stability. CPEC is an amalgamation of four aspects that include economic collaboration, geostrategic politics, energy issues and regional security (Mezzera, 2011).

The Emerging Win-Win Game:

Geopolitics attempts to study the effects of a state geography on politics and international affairs (Devetak, 1946). This concept points out how the course of relations among the world nations and their place in the world politics carries significance due to their geography. It is a way to understand, explain and even predict states behavior, expectations, and its political will. According to Evans Graham, geographical variables like

climate, area, topography, natural resources, and demography are evaluated to understand a state's stature and behavior in domestic and international affairs (Evans, 1988). Generally, geopolitics is considered as a facet of international relations. However, this consideration is built upon historical and geographical determinism theories (Gogwilt, 2000). Hence, geopolitics analyzes geographical factors that influence politics and power dynamics among states. Whereas geo-strategy is the course of action a nation adopts towards its neighbors and other states based on the analysis of all those geographical variables. It is a state's strategy in international power politics to secure its interests. In detail, geostrategy is a subfield of geopolitics. To Modernist, it is crafting state's presence in the international politics. It aims to shape international designs to enhance one's own security and prosperity. Moreover, this strategy advances towards securing vitals trade routes, islands, seas and rivers. This requires establishment of military stations and a network of alliances with great powers (Rogers, 2010). It portrays the importance of geostrategic location of state in the globalized world. It is a detailed political strategy based on geographical factors to secure or initiate common goals with other states in spheres of relations, defense, trade, and culture. Thus, geostrategy of a state combines both political and geographical aspects to shape a policy, project, corridor etc. to link means with the ends.

The Greater South Asia: Complex and Unstable Geopolitics

The geographical boundaries of South Asia have significantly interesting position. Except the Himalayas that demarcate boundary clearly, the rest of the region has been remained a subject of immigration, influences and

economic activities throughout the history. Therefore, the term South Asia is not confined to its geographical boundaries (Menon, 2017).

Geographically, South Asia comprises the Indian subcontinent and its surroundings regions. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) which represent the nations of South Asia represents Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives. According to Christopher Snedden, South Asia region is not precise to describe (Snedden, 2016). Afghanistan connects South Asia with the Central Asia through its Wakhan corridor. Through Tibet India, Nepal and Bhutan are connected with the North East Asian countries (Snedden, 2016). Pakistan, on one side, connects China with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Russia and on the other side reaches to South East Asia through Iran. Furthermore, India and Bangladesh share border with Myanmar, which connects them to the South East Asian states. In the light of Indian control on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, one can argue that she is a part of the South East Asia as these territories are much closer to Thailand and Myanmar.

The doctrine of Greater South Asia got currency during 2005-06 on the pattern of Japanese plan 'Greater South East Asia'. It was initiated by United States to merge South Asia with the West Asia through Afghanistan to form a bloc bigger than South Asia. It was meant to have a confederation having one currency and flag. India was supposed to lead this bloc. But due to US engagement in the Iraq war and the later economic crises the plan became morbid. The US engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan shifted the focus of the west from China and Russia growing

regional influence and technological advancements. In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping initiated BRI that includes the China Pakistan Economic corridor. To counter this new regional design, the US with the help of India wants to revitalize the Greater South Asia doctrine (Abrar, 2015)

Today the power structure is more stable in the world in comparison with the Cold War era. China, South Korea, Japan, and Indonesia are the growing economies that surround the Southern Asia. The region of Asia Pacific is slowly and steadily becoming the global economic hub. Consequently, nations around the world are looking beyond Afghanistan and seek the economic market of this region. However, the rivalry between China and India and the enmity between India and Pakistan have jeopardized the region. The current Sino-India clashes on borders and the India-Pakistan clash of interests in Afghanistan are deteriorating the peace and stability in the region. The continuous struggle between the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the US has made the region a troubled spot for decades. Now with the initiation of CPEC and peace talks in Afghanistan situation is expected to be better for human and economic development in the region despite their less support towards the South Asian region after the disintegration of USSR and ongoing economic crises and COVID-19 pandemic. However, the growing regionalism and economic revitalization of Chinese economy is creating opportunities for the regional countries (Abrar, 2015).

The Geostrategic importance of Pakistan:

Pakistan has been surrounded by three big powers i.e., China, India and Russia. It has border with Afghanistan a gateway to energy rich Central Asian countries and beyond. Iran, the neighbor in west has ties with Pakistan better than the Arab world. It is important to mention that Iran is the world fourth largest oil producer. Pakistan has friendly relations with China. However, its relations with India and Afghanistan have always been hostile. Being in the Geographical Pivot of History (Mackinder, 1904), USSR wanted to reach its shores. Hence, the struggle against USSR in Afghanistan was widely supported by the US and West alongside Pakistan. Since independence Pakistan remained an important player in the world politics. During the Cold War, through The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) 1954 and The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) 1955, Pakistan was a part of western block used for the containment of communism in the South East Asia and Middle East. In 1970s Pakistan brought US and China together. In the late 1970s Pakistan became a close ally of the US and West against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and gave shelter to more than 3 million Afghan refugees. Of which 1.5 million are still residing in Pakistan. After the 9/11, Pakistan became a non-NATO ally of US lead coalition forces in Afghanistan to restore and preserve peace of the world. Although the concept of 'the Geographical Pivot of History' became more interesting in the globalized world with advanced weapons and tactics. However, the technological advancement, economies and challenges, interests and defense pacts are playing an important role in defining the significance of a region. Mostly these areas are dominated by two nations: US and China. Munir Akram, former Pakistan ambassador to UN argue that the new world order will

considerably dependent upon the Sino-US relations. Their cooperation is much necessary for a stable world and their confrontation could lead to destabilization of several regions if not the whole world (Akram, 2018). Pakistan being a strong friend of China and an old ally of US can play a vital role in this scenario and recently Pakistan has proposed a mediator role in between the two giants.

CPEC: A Game Changer

CPEC the multi billion undertaking is a joint endeavor among the neighboring states, China, and Pakistan. In this project China will put 62 billion dollars in various areas (Kiani, 2016). Under CPEC, a quick upgradation of Pakistan's infrastructure and economy is planned (Hussain, 2015).

The CPEC will increase Pakistan's geopolitical and geostrategic relevance. Gwadar and Karachi seaports will expand their reach to include the northern part of Pakistan, as well as Central Asia and China (Shah, 2015). The Karakoram Highway will be reconstructed. Pakistan will build rail links to Kashgar (Rakisits, 2015). This project contains \$33 billion in energy projects to help Pakistan deal with its energy shortages (Rashid, 2015). This plan also includes a number of commercial zones, as well as gas and oil networks (Shah, 2015). It is China's "Marshall Plan" for the area, which aims to improve infrastructure and the economy while also expanding financial ties with Europe, Africa, and the Middle East (Curran, 2016). Official estimates suggest that 20% of the CPEC account is debt (Masood, 2019), with the remaining 80% being interest as a shared investment between the two countries (Kiani, 2019).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is seen as the centerpiece of President Xi Jinping's Economic transformation Programme. The Belt and Road Initiative is a USD 3 trillion project with a 30-year timeline. It will affect 60 percent of the world's population and 33 percent of global GDP. It will affect 60 percent of the world's population (Husain, 2018). With the launch of BRI, China has ushered in a new era of financial dominance that will extend from Asia and the Middle East to Africa and Europe (Lim, 2017). Under CPEC, Pakistan has the chance to bring growing economies such as China and India, as well as the world's second largest gas and fourth oil resource, Iran, closer together (Bilal, 2019). Regional cooperation, interconnectivity, unrestricted commerce, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds are all goals of the Initiative. There are six major corridors linking China to the rest of the world: four land routes and two maritime corridors. This initiative is in no way, to shape or to form any imperial design. However, to keep up and increase China's favorable position in global exchange by opening new business sectors for Chinese products.

China and other BRI participants will be able to access new business sectors thanks to the continuing economic corridors. Dr. Ishrat Husain discovered that it is up to the nations to decide how they would utilise this opportunity. The end result will be a win-win situation for all parties. In his piece "Activity not a Threat to the West," Wang Yiwei concludes that China has no desire to pursue the old great game in the region. However, BRI will bring boost regional businesses and relations. This is why, China has consented to 101 arrangements with 86 states and organizations,

creating 75 business zones employing 200,000 people on different positions. Wnag proceeds, it will bring more transparency, balance, and fair courses to globalization. It will strong state to state bonding, and economies. It will bring harmony and trust around the world (Yiwei, 2018).

Talking about CPEC, it is the most important venture under the BRI. CPEC is the biggest investment in Pakistan since its freedom. This game changer project has massive plans of structures which will make Pakistan a financial and exchange center for the whole region. The investment will go into energy, infrastructure, trade zones and so on. One of the significant issues of Pakistan today is the energy deficit, which has an expected cut of 2-2.5% in yearly GDP (Kugelman, 2015). In his research of Pakistan's monetary system in 2018, Fan Zhang, a Senior Economist at the World Bank, discovered the same. This energy issue has had a significant effect on Pakistan's textile sector; for instance, in Faisalabad alone, 20 percent of the total of manufacturing units have been closed (Rana, 2015). According to an article in the Financial Times, energy scarcity is a key barrier to international investment in Pakistan. However, this Chinese initiative will help revive the energy sector and will encourage additional investment in a variety of areas (Fingar, 2016).

CPEC: A venture for regional peace and friendly relations

Hua Chunying, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, acknowledges that the CPEC would link South Asian and East Asian countries, expanding the scope of cooperation, communication, and

mutual support (Pakistan China Institute, 2015). Mushahid Husain, Chairman of the Pakistan China Institute, told China Daily that this endeavor would be a catalyst for regional growth and will lay the foundation for a Greater South Asia that includes Afghanistan, China, and Iran, as well as Myanmar (Tiezzi, 2014). China's CPEC initiative isn't only about developing infrastructure; it's also about establishing new avenues for economic integration and regional coordination (The Guardian, 2015). It is a collection of different financial sectors, nodes, and hubs (Brunner, 2013).

China attaches great importance to the corridor, as shown by her thirteenth Five-Year Development Programme (Weidong, 2015). CPEC is an important part of China's strategy for the next phase of globalization (Mourdoukoutas, 2017). Its advantages for the region, notably for Pakistan, are dependent on the combined efforts of the public and private sectors. It should not be seen as a replacement for investments from other major countries, but rather as a first step toward making greater use of the state's geo - strategic location. Nothing will be able to prevent Pakistan from becoming a major trading hub for the East and West if the agreement is implemented correctly. This enterprise would restore Pakistan's credibility and attract massive financial investments from across the world.

Pakistan will benefit from linking China to South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia, despite its diverse terrain. Nevertheless, Pakistan and India disagree about the path by which Pakistan may reach Bengal, Bhutan, and Nepal. CPEC has the potential to help bring these two neighbors closer.

On Pakistan's proposal, it may be difficult for India to join CPEC. However, it may prefer negotiations with Beijing on the initiative in order to secure an agreement.

On the one hand, it will benefit Pakistan, but it will also provide India with access to Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and other countries. Economic and trade benefits will be delivered to 2 billion people in New Delhi, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, as well as to 110 million people in Iran and Afghanistan. Similarly, the 200 million people of Pakistan and the 110 million people of Iran and Afghanistan would provide a vast market for India (Faisal, 2019, p. 13). Furthermore, to avoid US sanctions, territorial states might build up an exceptional component, similar to the European Union Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).

As a result, CPEC is an inclusive financial engagement strategy that will contribute to the region's peace and progress.

As for as peace in the region is concerned, Pakistan and China are closely working with the regional states. The peace process in Afghanistan is an example. As Huasheng explained, China's monetary policy in Afghanistan is a two-path procedure, and CPEC is playing a crucial role in this prospect. Initially, to use Afghanistan as a CPEC linking node and to strive for peace and stability after the exit of US and ISAF soldiers (Huasheng, 2016). As a result of the CPEC, China has shown a strong interest in Afghanistan. That is why Beijing began and has stayed involved in peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan authorities since

the Chinese interest in Central Asia is heavily reliant on the Afghan peace process.

During the Cold War, Russia and India enjoyed cordial military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation. (Kumar, 2009). However, combined military exercises between Pakistan and Russia in 2016 revealed a shift in Russia's attitude toward China and Pakistan in the area, thanks to the ties between the United States and India. Therefore, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will counter this US-India partnership and will link Pakistan, China and Russia, enhancing the Sino-Pak-Russia strategic partnership.

Pakistan and China: All Weather Friendship

Pakistan and China can take maximum advantages of the CPEC and BRI, if many regional states decide to participate in the project. The enmity and hostilities between the regional powers can hamper the benefits of this opportunity. China is a dominant power in the region both in terms of economy and technology, however, states like India and Bangladesh are catching up. India is one of the biggest market in the region and countries from around the world are investing heavily. This market must be made a part of CPEC.

Further, the ongoing politics in the region can divide the region further and boost hostilities if India and Iran remained out of CPEC. US hugely rely on India in the South Asia and surroundings. Similarly, China used Pakistan hostility with India against India to maintain the balance. Iran on

the other side is an important player in the Middle East. It can provide a gateway to Middle East through its Chabahar port. Consequently, China, Pakistan and other countries can reach to oil resources in the Middle East. China can also utilize Pakistan's good relations with the Muslim countries. The current government of United States is more reserved in relations with the Muslim world and China can fill this empty space using Pakistan as a intermediary.

Pakistan is currently facing energy shortfall and is hugely impacting its economic sectors, human development, and foreign investments. CPEC has many energy projects that can address this issue. Similarly, CPEC will develop the decaying old infrastructure of Pakistan in sectors like roads, railways, and economic zones. Following shifts in the policy can make this project more advantageous:

India has grave concerns over the BRI and consider CPEC an attempt against its territorial integrity. This negative attitude is mainly because of Pakistan's inclusion of Kashmir territory into the project. The issue of Kashmir is a very delicate issue between India and Pakistan. China can mediate and can convince both neighbors to keep trade and politics separate. The issue of Kashmir should not hinder the project otherwise the rivalry between these three nuclear states can reach to a dangerous level.

Pakistan needs to deeply work on its security structure. Proper security to this project is mandatory. Pakistan should also work alongside Afghanistan to boost its security. Elimination of terrorism and extremism from the Pak-Afghan border areas will develop the trust of other

developed countries of the world which in turn will bring more investments.

Pakistan and China shall reveal the details about the CPEC. As several local as well as international groups have concerns about this project. They consider it a debt trap. Revealing the possible details as recently promised by the Pakistani government can make this project more attractive and dependable.

Although there are US sanctions on Iran, but China and Pakistan can follow the precedent of Iran and can arrange special trade instrument for Iran. This will help Iran to reach Gwadar, the free trade zone. Similarly, business established in Gwadar will have an easy access to the nearby Iranian market.

Pakistan and China intend to include other countries into the project. They need to develop the mechanism of inclusion and the level of participation for third parties.

There are few reservations of Baloch. They consider CPEC as the dominance of outsiders in Balochistan. Balochistan is the most underdeveloped province of Pakistan and the most important port i.e., Gwadar Port is located at the shores of Balochistan. Pakistani government needs to tackle the issues Baloch have in order to get most out of CPEC.

Pakistani bureaucracy has the record of red tapism and formalities. China has showed concerns over the processes and procedures prevailing in

Pakistan, which causes delay. Pakistan needs to work with China closely to speed up the development process.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Pakistan and this region has the opportunity to get maximum out of the CPEC. It is not only an economic corridor but a prospect for good relations and settling of disputes. CPEC has the potential to connect China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, CARs countries and Russia. All these nations possess rich natural resources and huge markets. States like China, Pakistan and India can take advantage of these resources. This also will push the regional states to work for the peaceful settlement of the ongoing Afghanistan conflict.

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