

CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC): VULNERABLE TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SABOTAGE

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being a flagship project of China's ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is prone to both domestic and international sabotage events. At domestic level, issues like Baluch insurgency, divisions among the provinces, institutional vagaries, demographic imbalance and environmental concerns are hampering the progress of CPEC. On the international front, it is being obstructed by India, United States, unrest in Xinjiang and the chaotic situation in Afghanistan. India is opposing this project owing to its proposed route through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir that makes China an indirect stakeholder in Kashmir conflict while US is suspicious of China's strategic imperatives in the garb of economic projects. However, despite all these hurdles, Pakistan is taking all out measures to offset any hindrance in the way of CPEC.

Keywords: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Domestic, International, Sabotage

INTRODUCTION

CPEC is one of the parts of the bigger Chinese economic strategy: A strategy that rests on inter and intraregional connectivity. In 2015, Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce came up with the idea of making a Maritime Silk Road and Silk Road economic belt. It has five layers of connectivity. The layers of connectivity are policy, physical, economic, financial and human. The basic motive is to rejuvenate the historical dynamic silk route that interfaced old civilizations of Europe, Africa and Asia. The very idea of making the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (also known as One Belt, One Road or OBOR) was suggested by President Xi Jinping in 2013. At that time he was on his visit to Central and South Asia during his visit to Central and South Asia.¹

The project is marked by the idea of development, cooperation, peace and mutual benefit. CPEC that was started in 2013 is a kind of developmental project between the two time tested friends: Pakistan and China. The

magnanimous project is believed to join Gwadar port of Baluchistan in Pakistan with Kashgar in Western province of China. The whole project is an aggregate wide, long and complicated network. It is very well connected by means of roads in combination with infrastructure programs which includes railways, hydropower projects, dams and pipelines.²

CPEC was initially officially inaugurated in April 2015. It brought a whopping investment of US\$ 46 billion into economy of Pakistan that was in the nosedive stage. Energy and Transportation sectors of Pakistan are going to benefit immensely from this investment. CPEC is called as the flag bearer program of China's One Belt and Road policy. It is considerate at increasing attachment between Eurasia-Pakistan and China. Creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Pakistan is accompanied by a set of Energy and Transportation development Programs. The project is estimated to stretch for a period of fifteen years. It is expected to be completed by 2030.

¹ FMPRC 2013, 'President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries', Foreign Ministry People's Republic of China, 9 September.

² Sheikh, Mansoor Ahmad, and Sheikh Shazia Mehboob. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Challenges and Opportunities for India."

In CPECT total investment, the sector of energy will take the largest chunk- the energy sector will take seventy two percent of the total sum of US thirty three Billion dollars. The second biggest investment is to be done in Transportation sector. New roads would be constructed and worn out and broken roads would be revamped. This sector would take eleven (11) billion that roughly makes the twenty four (24) percent of the total investment. Apart from this, it is expected that there would be Special Economic Zones. By facilitating huge industrial growth in financial centre of Pakistan and in other areas of Pakistan that are of strategic importance, the SEZs are all ready to increase regional connectivity across whole of the Eurasian continent.³

Challenges at domestic front:

Security Challenge:

Functioning of Gwadar port is threatened by one of the daunting challenges of security. There are some people who have vested interests and it is they who are overestimating apprehensions regarding the security environment of Gwadar. In such a situation, it is, therefore, of vital importance that such nefarious and stumbling elements are brought to control; so, the security situation of the whole corridor can be ensured. In this regard, one thing is worth attention that in order to gain this goal, local population should be made part of the decision making and whole implementation process. Also, it should be ensured that signs of development are apparent to the general masses. It is almost next to impossible to complete such a massive project without the all out support and help of the locals.

One of the other uphill challenges is an element of security threat that is present on both internal and external fronts. Both the partners of CPEC have internal security threats. Importantly, Pakistan is at the forefront of terrorism extremism. There are multiple extremist groups ranging from Xinjiang to Gwadar. These groups consist of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar e-Tayyiba, Lashkar e-Jhangvi, Daesh, Balochistan Liberation Front. Apart from this, there are some militant offshoots of some political parties. Stopping the developmental activity of CPEC is one of the core aims of these groups In recent years, if one look at

the record, it would be evident that two Chinese have been killed in Baluchistan province. Resultantly, the government of Pakistan had to deploy some more security for the five thousand (5,000) Chinese workers who are working in different portions of the project.⁴

There are plenty of energy and mineral resources in Baluchistan. There have always been grievances from the side of Baluch nationalists that the Federal government exploits the unrelenting resources of Baluchistan without compensating them for the said resources. It is alleged that the consecutive governments haven't played their due role to redress and solve the long pending issues. As a result, an easy path has been paved for the bleeding revolts and also insurgencies. Apart from this, there is dearth of problem resolution techniques and well being of the common masses. Owing to these reasons there is burning nationalism in Baluchistan. Additionally, the nationalist perspective is mishandled by the federal government. The absence of problem resolution mechanisms and the negligence of the well being of the masses are also the reasons of rising nationalism in Balochistan. Real negligence from the central government is the mishandling of the nationalists' perspective.

Groups and many political parties of Baluchistan including National Awami Party, Baluch Republican Party and one of the most infamous separatist group "The Baluchistan Liberation Army" have usually come up with multiple reservations about CPEC. BLA is in efforts to carve out an independent state of Balochistan: A state that is free from the clutches of Pakistan. A per reports, during the construction of Gwadar port, Chinese Engineers were killed and reportedly BLA is involved in the murder of those engineers.

Regarding CPEC, Baluch Nationalists have come forward with the following reservations.

- Control of federal Government
- Gwadar Seaport - Demographic changes/Imbalance
- Political Instability
- Dearth of Educational Institutions
- Very little Representation in National Services

³ Bhattacharyya, Abhijit "Joining \$46 bn China-Pakistan Economic Corridor would be adverse for India, hurt sovereignty," The Financial Express, January 3, 2017,

⁴ Ghaffar, A., Pongponich, S., Ghaffar, N., & Mehmood, T. (2015). Factors associated with utilization of antenatal care services in Balochistan province of Pakistan: An analysis of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2010. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 31 (6), 1447.

- Obliteration of Baluch Identity & Culture from Pakistan
- Disempowerment of the Local people⁵

Political Differences:

Political differences among political parties of Pakistan are present more hurdles in the progress of CPEC. There are political differences on a range of subjects: Most notables include: wide differences on route selection, and allocation of funds for different developmental projects under the banner of CPEC. There are disagreements on policies between smaller provinces and federal government. Also, suspicions are raised every now and then over transparency of CPEC. There are growing demands with each passing day to makes all the agreements with China public, so everyone could know about their due share. If, such deadlock remained between the provinces and center, it would then lead unnecessary delay and postponement of different projects under the umbrella of CPEC. Time and again, KP and the province of Baluchistan have shown their reservations against the proposed routes with the central government.

Back in May, 2015, in order to address the reservation of the smaller provinces in relation to CPEC, an All Parties Conference (APC) was being called. In that Conference, all the present parties agreed in principle to make progress on western route and all of them pledged their all out support for it. However, that issue is far from over. In order to squeeze political benefits, the deployment of resources has been politicized.

Bad Weather:

In addition to this, bad weather is one of the challenges to be faced by CPEC. Bad weather, for sure, would cause hurdles in the path of CPEC as during the Winter season, transportation becomes difficult. Roads in the upper areas are blocked due to heavy snow. In order to open the routes, it would need hell of an effort to start snow clearing process. Snow-clearing activities would need to be launched for opening the routes. High Altitude is another daunting hurdle for the construction of proposed pipeline.⁶

⁵ Bhatti, Muhammad Nawaz, Ghulam Mustafa, and Farzad Ahmad. "China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges." (2020).

⁶ Farooq, Umar, and Asma Shakir Khawaja. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Geopolitical Implications, Regional

Challenges at regional and International level:

Afghanistan:

One of the stumbling blocks in the successful completion of CPEC is the uncertain security environment of Afghanistan. It is a matter of vital concern that the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is porous that presents with itself some challenges. Owing to this porous border, terrorists are able to filter inside Pakistan and carry out their nefarious designs in the North Western region of Pakistan. Intimate and friendly relations between brotherly countries between Pakistan is vital for the security of CPEC; otherwise, any constrain in their relations would put CPEC on backburner.

China has always facilitated dialogue in Afghanistan between the warring parties in order to reap benefits for successful completion of CPEC. A stable and secure Afghanistan is of vital importance for CEPEC and ultimately the region. Pakistan has also taken steps in this regard: It facilitated US in bringing Taliban to the negotiating table.

Indian Viewpoint:

Since, both Pakistan and India lay opposing claims on the disputed territory of Jammu and Kahsmir; so, India has shown its fears regarding the route that passes through disputed Jammu and Kashmir. Sushma Susraj (Late), the Ex Foreign Minister of India in one of her statements labeled the route that passes via disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir as totally unacceptable. that India is extremely apprehensive about CPEC's route that passes from disputed Jammu and Kashmir region as both Pakistan and India assert their claim on the territory.

As per Indian claims, CPEC violates Indian territorial integrity as its route is via the disputed area. Since the day, CPEC has started; India has every now and then come hard verbally against CPEC at the national, regional and international forums. Moreover, India also recorded its protest by boycotting OBOR forum that was held in Beijing in 2017 (Miglani, 2017 May 13). Some Indian Scholars have come in clear terms that CPEC is a project on the pattern of Colonization whereby China is making Gwadar Port and by thgis it wants to gain access to the all important Indian Ocean.

Constraints and Benefits of CPEC." *South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2019): 599.

The Naval presence of China in Arabian Sea is constant headache for India. Moreover, India fears that the Gwadar Port can be utilized for the military and strategic purposes that would ultimately crack the Indo-US partnership. In addition to this, India feels that it is being encircled by China by means of its string of Pearls policy. China's ports construction in Bangladesh, Srilanka and Myanmar is feared by India.⁷

Furthermore, the Defense minister of India has publically acknowledged the charting of proxy wars in Pakistan by means of financing terrorism. Afghanistan's land is constantly being utilized by India to serve its nefarious interests against Pakistan and CPEC. International community ought to take strong notice of the belligerent statement coming out of Indian circles. These facts are substantiated by Pakistan when it exposed the nexus of NDS and Raw networks. Kalbushan Jadhav has confessed to his evil designs on TV whereby he said that he was running terrorist network in Baluchistan to undo the CPEC. India's stance that CPEC runs through the disputed territory of Gilgit has been out rightly rejected by China time and again.⁸

US Policy on CPEC and South Asia:

US has strategic interests and goals in South Asia. In order to counter China, US has forged alliance with India. US has a keen eye on forty percent of the world's gas and oil reserves that are lying there in Indian ocean; so, it has strategic significance for United States. United States of America has strategic interests and objectives in South Asia. In order to secure strategic interests, both china and US are engaged in protracted struggle. China is moving ahead with its belt and Road initiative while US is trying to contain China.

US is more interested in giving an independent status to Baluchistan. It has been reported by the Global Research scholar, Michel Chossudovsky, that separatist struggles across the world are being hijacked by foreign powers to realize their dreams. According to him, the British intelligence agencies, Mossad & CIA ensure facilities to Baluch militants in Iran and Afghanistan to create

⁷ ibid

⁸ Umar, Zahid, Shaista Taj, and Saqib Adnan. "CPEC: Security Threats and Measures." *The Dialogue* 14, no. 1 (2019): 17-17.

instability in the region. By this it wants to curb Chinese influence.⁹

CPEC is the flagship project of Chinese One Belt or Silk Route Policy; the more China benefits from it the more US interests are harmed in the region.¹⁰ United States has been cautioning Pakistan that it would have face off with long-term economic damage with least return, if; China is allowed to pursue its giant infrastructure push. One of the top US Diplomats for South Asia echoed the idea that US has better model for Pakistan in contrast to the CPEC as it would benefit China more than it benefit Pakistan. US eggs Pakistan that billion dollars investment with China is brimmed with non-concessionary loans. Also, China sends its own labors rather than providing skills to Pakistani labors that puts an additional pressure on Pakistan's economy. Moreover, situation would be worsened when the time would be due for repayments. On the other hand, US claims that its private investment would fish out Pakistan of the troubled waters. However, one thing needs to be kept in mind and it's the historical record of both US and China with Pakistan. Historically, China has been a reliable friend as compared to US.¹¹

State Response to these Challenges:

Pakistan is fully cognizant of strategic importance of alliance with China. Islamabad takes CPEC as mutually lucrative for both Pakistan and China. The Central govt. aims to improve economic indicators by means of energy projects and widening infrastructure.¹² On the security Pakistan has taken following measures to avoid terror events:

- Army & Law Enforcement Agencies troops have been physically deployed on static and dynamic projects.

⁹ Bhatti, Muhammad Nawaz, Ghulam Mustafa, and Farzad Ahmad. "China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges." (2020).

¹⁰ Umar, Zahid, Shaista Taj, and Saqib Adnan. "CPEC: Security Threats and Measures." *The Dialogue* 14, no. 1 (2019): 17-17.

¹¹ Ahmad, Riaz, Hong Mi, and Lloyd W. Fernald. "Revisiting the potential security threats linked with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)." *Journal of the International Council for Small Business* 1, no. 1 (2020): 64-80.

¹² Khawaja, I. (2018, July 29). Vision 2025 score. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1423578>

- Chinese are protected from living areas to working sites.¹³
- There has been an improved coordination with civilian law enforcement agencies like and Levies etc.
- Chinese working on sites have been sensitized about the current security environment.
- There are Intelligence-based operations in the proximity of working sites.
- Private security guards are deployed on less vulnerable sites.¹⁴

Conclusion:

CPEC is the flagship project of China's ambitious One Belt one Road step. Keeping in view its vital importance, it, since its very first day, is vulnerable to challenges at the national, regional and international level. On the domestic front, it has hurdles in the shape of institutional weakening, insurgencies, differences between political parties and resources allocation for different routes. On the international front, CPEC's security is challenged by aggressive states like India and US and in the form of instability in Afghanistan. However, both Pakistan and China are cognizant of all the threats and are responding to them by making all out efforts in all aspects.

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