

China Pakistan Economic Corridor-A Game Changer for regional prosperity with fears

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Abstract

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has turned a new leaf in historically proven Sino-Pakistan relations. CPEC is expected to give easier and cheaper access to China with regional countries by connecting Gwadar port with western China. No doubt it's a game changer not only for Pakistan but for entire region with a string of unknown fears. A critical analysis has been carried out during the discourse of subject research in the backdrop of unknown fears attached with CPEC. The surge in trade investment and financial flow would bring not just peace and prosperity to the region through enhancement in the competitiveness of the economies of the countries, but also better living standards seeking to reduce regional disparities and social inequality and improve life expectancy as well as quality of life in the country and in adjoining region. At the same time there is a dire need to address some of the fears to boost the prevailing snail pace speed of the CPEC.

Keywords: CPEC, reality, prosperity, benefits, fear, analysis

Introduction

Immediately after the start of Mughals era in the subcontinent, the land focused policy started, which kept the Mughals away from the Oceans. Ultimately Mughals had to pay heavy price, when Britishers invaded India. But once again now the old desire of Central Asian Republics (part of former Soviet Union) and China's "Access to the warm waters" is soon going to be materialized through the CPEC and by construction of Gwadar Port. Geographically the corridor (CPEC) connects through the 3000 KM road and rail link including the Kashghar in West China autonomous region to Pakistan's South Western part of Gwadar (Baluchistan). This is multifaceted deal involves the energy, infrastructure development projects relating to roads, rail, ports and cooperation in the field of social development (Iqbal, 2015).

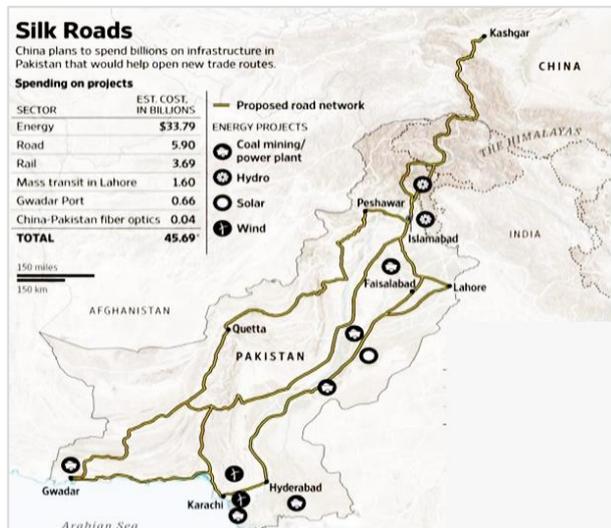
This corridor is also expected to help some of the most under developed areas of Pakistan by reducing poverty and generating job opportunities while on the other hand it would considerably reduce the transportation time of goods and energy for Chinese products. Currently export of goods from China to Middle East and Africa via Strait of Malacca takes about 45 days that could be reduced to less than 10 days if transported through Gwadar Port. (Mehmood, 2014) In a broader

view the CPEC will closely connect the Central Asia, West Asia and Gulf states through energy and economic cooperation. Times are changing, the world is transforming, and Asia remains at the epicenter of this 21st century transformation. CPEC which is seventh economic corridor of BRI, provided Pakistan and the surroundings countries enormous opportunities as it gives an integrating platform for over three billion people on middle east and Africa. The CPEC project epitomizes the growing mutuality of interest and the vision of a shared politico economic future on the part of Pakistan and China.

It creates a new framework of interaction on the basis of economic connectivity and regional cooperation which will have far reaching positive implications for the two countries as well as the adjoining regions. CPEC is conceived where the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road converge thus it's a flag ship project of BRI. (Rizvi, 2019) Since CPEC is an integral part of BRI thus seeks to turn silk route into an economic reality therefore, it won't be an exaggeration to call CPEC a game changer for Pakistan, Asia and wider region. China is connected with Pakistan through Karakoram Highway. Karakoram Highway was started in 1959 & completed in 1979 (Open to public since 1986). Its total length is 1,300 km (Pakistan 887 km & China 413 km). CPEC is collection of projects which links Gwadar Port in Southwestern Pakistan to China's Northwestern autonomous region of Xingiang. (Development, 2016)

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- Maritime Silk Road, running from the Chinese Coast through Singapore to the Mediterranean.



Economic Gateway Gwadar

On 8th Sep 58, Pakistan purchased Gwadar from Oman for \$3 M and Gwadar Port is located at mouth of Persian Gulf at Gawadar. It is a planned free trade port for which 653 km long Makran Coastal Highway linking Gwadar with Karachi has already been constructed. (Shahzad, 2019)

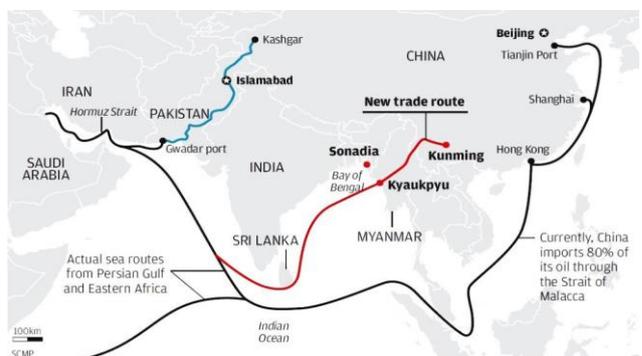
One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative

Silk Road Economic Belt & 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road are also known as One Belt and One Road (OBOR) Initiative, Belt and Road (B&R) & Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). (Javed, 2019). CPEC will certainly have geo-political implications for Pakistan and broader region, especially given the scale of the proposed investments and its connection to (OBOR). (Maini Tridivesh Singh, 2016) Development Strategy of China focuses on connectivity & cooperation between Eurasian countries, primarily People’s Republic of China, land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) & ocean-going Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Whereas BRI is one of largest infrastructure & investment mega-projects in history, covering more than 68 countries, equivalent to 65% of world’s population & 40% of global GDP as of 2019 . Belt and Road initiative is geographically structured along following 6 corridors, & Maritime Silk road. (Pakistan, 2018)

- New Eurasian Land Bridge, running from Western China to Western Russia through Kazakhstan.
- China–Mongolia–Russia Corridor, running from Northern China to Eastern Russia.
- China–Central Asia–West Asia Corridor, running from Western China to Turkey.
- China–Indochina Peninsula Corridor, running from Southern China to Singapore.
- China–Myanmar–Bangladesh–India Corridor, running from Southern China to Myanmar.
- China–Pakistan Corridor, running from South-Western China to Pakistan.

Benefits to China

Chinese industries are facing problems to compete in global market due to high transportation cost & delivery time. CPEC will decrease travel distance & cost significantly from China to Gulf countries. Even if China uses CPEC for 50% of its Oil supplies, it will save \$ 6 Million everyday & almost \$ 2 Billion every year. Currently export of goods from China to Middle East and Africa via Strait of Malacca takes about 45 days that could be reduce to less than 10 days, if transported through Gwadar Port. (Shahzad, 2019) In broader view the CPEC will closely connect the central Asia West Asia and Gulf states through energy and economic cooperation. Through CPEC, China will get autonomous path that will be free from India & USA’s influence.



Benefits to Pakistan

CPEC will result in establishment of Strategic & Economic trade routes within as well as outside the country. Development and uplift of new and existing infrastructure is being undertaken under the umbrella of CPEC. The corridor will focus on development of some of the most under developed regions of Pakistan like FATA, KPK, Baluchistan & Southern Punjab. Increased trade activity in Pakistan will result in generation of Job Opportunities. Investments by China will boost Pakistan’s \$ 312.57 Billion GDP by over 15%. Pakistan can avail great opportunities

from China's expertise in various sectors like energy, technology and education sectors.

CPEC will open western China and Central Asia with connectivity to the sea with the most efficient route to sea through Gwadar. It will provide two way trade routes to the world, not only for Pakistan but for Afghanistan, Central Asia and western China. It will provide rail and road links, gas, power, information (IT) links, and it will also provide this region with access to the world through the BRI. Above all, the special economic zones will provide entrepreneurs from Pakistan, China and all over the world to take opportunity of what CPEC provides to build business, to increase trade, to improve their output, to increase efficiency and that is where the real Fruits of CPEC lie. The projects under CPEC are built fewer than two basic principles. The first principle is economically viability and the second is environmental sustainability. Even the coal plants that are built to diversify energy needs will replace the very inefficient oil generation mechanism, and will also be environmentally positive. Pakistan today is privileged to be able to use CPEC for not only its development, but, also to provide connectivity and contribute to the development of the region and western China. (Pakistan S. K., 2018)

Spatial layout of CPEC

The detail of spatial layout regarding CPEC of ONE BELT, Three Axes and Five Functional Zones is appended below: (Development, 2016)

- **One Belt** refers to the strip area formed by important arterial traffic in China and Pakistan, which belongs to the core area of the Corridor. This northeast-southwest strip area starts from Kashgar, passes through Tashghorgan, Khunjerab Pass, Islamabad, and Lahore along the traffic artery, and ends in Sukkur where it is divided into two routes heading for Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea coast. One Belt is the core area of the CPEC and the economic cluster area of industries, population and cities.
- **Three Passages** refer to the east, central and west traffic passages in the core area from Islamabad to Karachi and Gwadar, each of which consists of several trunk railways and highways. The East Passage Consists of railway-highway network from Islamabad to Karachi, via Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Sukkur, and Hyderabad, and is the main traffic artery of the Corridor. The Central Passage starts from Islamabad in the north to Karachi, via Darya Khan, Jacobabad, and Khuzdar through N25, to Gwadar through M8. The construction of this passage has not been entirely completed, and some sections are still under construction. The West Passage starts from Islamabad in the north and to Gwadar, via D.I.khan, Quetta, Basima and Hoshab.
- **"Two Axes"** refer to East-West development axes in the CPEC that are vertical to main traffic arteries, i.e.

Lahore-Islamabad-Peshawar and Karachi-Gwadar development axes. The economic development levels and geographical location conditions of the area where the "Two Axes" are located differ greatly. These are the key areas for strengthening of regional linkage and promotion of coordinated development of regions in the Corridor construction. The first axes-Lahore-Islamabad-Peshawar may not be considered as true alignment of East-West rather partially may be called north-south axes but it passes through the major built up area.

- **Five Functional Zones** The Corridor is divided into five function zones according to the regional development level, industrial structure, resource and environmental bearing capacity, and growth potential. These zones cover major node cities, traffic passages and industrial cluster areas. These are:
 - **Southern Xinjiang Zone** of Industry, logistic, and economic development (Kashgar – Atushi – Tumshuq – Khunjerab)
 - **Northern Pakistan Zone** of border logistic channel, resource exploration and ecological conservation (Islamabad – Khunjerab)
 - **Central Pakistan Zone** of industrial and economic development (Karachi – Sukkur – Multan – Islamabad – Lahore)
 - **Western Pakistan Zone** of logistic channel, mineral exploration and ecological conservation (Gwadar – Quetta – Dera Ismail Khan)
 - **Southern Pakistan Zone** of energy, logistics, trade and business development (Gwadar – Karachi).

Routes of CPEC

The Gwadar Port is presently connected with Karachi via coastal highway, but for north south connection of CPEC with Gwadar port, public have shown concern over grievances and fear of various political parties regarding route location of the CPEC. Nonetheless, this unknown fear has been addressed by the Government by alleviating the growing concerns of the public. According to the planning commission, now there will be three routes (Eastern, Central and Western) for CPEC traffic to reach Gwadar Port as: (Javed, 2019)

Route No 1: Gwadar – Turbat – Punjgor – Nag – Kalat – Quetta – Pashin – Qilasaifullah – Zhob – D I Khan – Peshawar – Mansehra/ Abbotabad – Raikot – Khunjrab – China

Route No 2: Gwadar – Turbat – Hoshab – Panjgor – Nag – Khuzdar – Ratodero – Deramuradjamali – Rajanpur – D G Khan – Layyah – Bhakkar – Mianwali – Islamabad – Peshawar – Mansehra / Abbotabad – Ranikot – Khunjrab – China

Route No 3: Gwadar – Karachi – Hyderabad – Sukkhar – Multan – Faisalabad/ Lahore – Mandi Bahaudin – Islamabad – Peshawar – Mansehra/ Abbotabad – Ranikot – Khunjrab – China

Sectors of Cooperation

The corridor (CPEC) connects through the 2000 km road and rail link including the Kashgar in West China autonomous region to Pakistan's South Western part of Gwadar (Baluchistan). The Silk Road project by China under which CPEC is a major part will also form up its connectivity through network of roads and ports to Europe, Asia and Africa. (Emphass on Gawader-Kashgar corridore, 21 April 2015) This is multifaceted deal which involves the following broad areas of cooperation:

- Coal-fired power plants.
- Hydroelectric wind generated power.
- Solar power stations.
- Coal supplies.
- Road rail network.
- Sea and Air Ports.
- Infrastructure development for Industrial Zones.

This project, whose portfolio has now crossed \$50 billion, is celebrated as the "flagship project" of China's Belt and Road initiative. (Lu, 2018)The corridor is also expected to keep in focus some of the most under developed areas of Pakistan to reduce poverty and generate job opportunities, while on the other hand it would considerably reduce the transportation time of goods and energy for Chinese products. CPEC is defined as game changer for Pakistan China has pledged to invest initially \$46 billion in a highway network from Khunjrab to Gwadar, energy projects and the establishment of Economic Zones. The stated policy of the Pakistan government is to spread the benefits of this investment through the equitable distribution of resources and projects to all provinces. But a fear still exists among the smaller provinces that major share of the cake is going to the province of Punjab, which need to be addressed on priority.

Special Economic Zones

The first model Special Economic Zone (SEZ) will be developed at Gwadar under CPEC; it will be spread over an area of 3,000 acres, fully functional by end of 2020. It would be developed by China (Gwadar to get first SEZ under CPEC, 2016) and will be comprising of:

- Industrial Units for mines/minerals.
- Food processing Units.
- Agricultural Units.
- Live stocks Units.
- Energy Units.

The remaining SEZ would be developed and designed on the same lines. A total of 27 SEZs would be set up in Pakistan under CPEC. Out of these 27, the 250-acres SEZ for Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) would be located at Moqpondass for mining and food processing. KhayberPakhtunkhwa will have eight SEZs the highest among all provinces, followed by seven each in Punjab and Baluchistan, three in Sindh and one each in Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad. (ibid) The Zones in Baluchistan would include:

- Lasbela Industrial Estate 1290 acres
- Turbat Industrial and Trading Estate 1000 acres
- DeraMuradJamali Industrial and Trading Estate 50 acres
- Winder Industrial and Trading Estate 50 acres
- Mini Industrial Estate 50 acres
- Khuzdar Industrial Estate 5 acres
- Bostan Industrial Estate 1000 acres

The three SEZs in Sindh would include:

- Exclusive Chinese Industrial Zone near Karachi 2000 acres
- Textile city near Port Qasim at Gharo on super highway 1250 acres
- Marble city Karachi 300 acres

In KhayberPakhtunkhwa, except for expansion of existing industrial zone at Hattar, all seven SEZs would be green field initiatives. (ibid)

- Marble and Granite Estate Mansehra 80 acres
- Manufacturing Industrial Estate Noshera 1000 acres
- Food Processing Industrial Estate Chitral 80 acres
- Manufacturing Industrial Estate Ghazi 90 acres
- Manufacturing Industrial Estate D I Khan 188 acres
- Manufacturing Industrial Estate Bannu
- Manufacturing Industrial Estate between -

Kohat and Karak

The largest of all 27 SEZs would be based in the Punjab's Pind Daden Khan Industrial City which would be spread over 10,000 acres and would have industrial units for agriculture, textile, food processing, live stock, manufacturing and energy. (ibid)

Investment Portfolio

CPEC is also proving to be a major attraction for domestic investors who see it as catalyst for Pakistan to grow its economy at a pace achieved by leading regional peers. Punjab Board of Investment and Trade have reported that CPEC is not only attracting domestic investors but also foreign capital. Several foreign companies are keen on partnering with local investors and provincial government to launch projects in different sectors of the economy. The CPEC \$ 46 billion investment until 2030 will finance a

series of transport infrastructure projects (\$ 11 billion, mostly public investment) and energy projects (\$ 33 billion). These investments will turn Pakistan into the centre of global economic activities. (Iqbal P. A., 2015)

It is pertinent to mention that the \$ 46 billion figure commonly associated with CPEC is only for the first phase. Depending upon the early and satisfactory completion, more investment with no fixed limit can be poured in by China under "One belt and one road (OBOR) initiative. (Pakistan I. K., 18 Oct 2019) CPEC is part of China's massive OBOR transcontinental and transoceanic initiative.

Fears

Although there are several perks and privileges attached with CPEC at the same time many fears are also attached with it. The main fear arises from the current mind set and the model of doing business as usual. As a nation if the practices of bickering, blame-game, point scoring, driven by narrow parochial and personal considerations, strewn by red tape, hesitations and delays in solving problems and removing bottlenecks continue, then the country would find itself entrapped in heavy financial burdens. The project would not be completed on time or would be hit by constant overruns, diminishing the net benefits and therefore our repayment capacity.

The other fear is attached with expansion of the power generating capacity without repairing the distribution companies, the circular debt burden would keep on rising, causing serious problems for public finances. Low recovery rates, electricity theft, leakages, inefficiencies, and line losses would create further wedge between the purchase price and sales revenues. The restructuring and reforms of distributing companies has been over due for quite some time, but the risk would be amplified when its move from 20,000 MW generation to 30,000 MW capacity. A competitive power market with multiple buyers and multiple sellers is needed to overcome the highly problematic issues.

Another fear may arise if the quality of our machinery does not conform to international standards. The toxic combinations of purchasing second hand machinery and over invoicing of imports have proved lethal to both the productivity of industry as well as to external payments regime.

International inspection companies of repute should be engaged for certifying the machinery and equipment that would be brought to CPEC industrial zones. (Hussain, 2018)

Most of the MOUs/contracts are being finalized /signed in isolation without making them public which creates transparency issues. But a conscious approach needs to be adopted while covering, drafting and finalizing these MOUs, contracts and agreement to ensure that CPEC may not turn into another East India Company.

Analysis

While investing huge amount on development of road/rail infrastructure or land, a very important aspect of Maritime infrastructure development is being completely ignored. It should be kept in mind that entire such traffic will be culminating at Gwadar Port, where necessary Maritime infrastructure needs to be developed on urgent basis. Chinese and Pakistan Maritime Security Agencies and Institutes of oceanography of both countries need to work hands in gloves for Maritime infrastructure development and to address security issues at Gwadar and beyond, further collaboration can be done for Maritime security at Gwadar Port and out at Sea and in the field of Maritimes research. A true and sustainable exploitation of Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone and genuine scientific research with the help of China will yield rich dividends for Pakistan.

According to the planning commission, now there will be three routes (Eastern, Central and Western) for CPEC traffic to reach Gwadar Port (Javed, 2019). Critical analysis of such huge traffic coming through these three routes at Gwadar may create a traffic blocked. Single port may not be able to handle such a huge flux of load. So another port needs to be envisaged in the near vicinity close to Jiwani or Pasni area. Mostly these three routes start from locations close to Islamabad in the north and moves south towards Gwadar but, Peshawar – Mansehra- Abbotabad – Raikot – Khunjab – China route at further up north has a single road along the river Indus. Now there is emergent need to built four lanes roads on both sides of the river to handle twoway traffic separately.

Most of the MOUs/contracts are being finalized /signed in isolation without making them public which creates transparency issues. Clear approach needs to be adopted while finalizing these MOUs/contracts of the CPEC to have real transparency and to remove the prevailing unknown fear of the public. Equally and judicial distribution of incoming resources need to be done among all provinces to remove the fear of other provinces that bigger share of the cake is presently going to province of Punjab. Pakistan needs to guard its security and careful monitoring of all projects and the human resource attached with each project is to be done so that bad taste of east India Company may not be repeated again.

General awareness for CPEC projects is negligible in Pakistan as the businessmen community, academia bureaucracy and political leadership are not on one page due to vested interest especially on project related infrastructure. There is a dare need for coastal area development which is not taking place due to lack of will by authorities sitting at the helm of affairs. Research relating to CPEC affairs is also negligible in all schools, college and universities in entire country. Thus, there is dare need to create CPEC awareness among the public and relevant stake holders to thwart various fears relating to CPEC affairs in Pakistan.

Conclusion

With CPEC, China-Pakistan relationship has transformed to strategic economic cooperation. CPEC is not a trade and economic agreement centric to economic and social development of Pakistan but the “opportunity of the 21st century” and a “game-changer” for whole region. Much larger than its bilateral benefits, it is indeed a corridor of peace and prosperity, not only for the people of Pakistan and China but also for the region and beyond. It will bind all these nations together and bring about an economic transformation through enhanced connectivity.

CPEC is a lifetime opportunity to improve the socio-economic transformation. In the place of today’s rugged mountains and lifeless barren deserts, emergence of modern infrastructure, SEZs, health facilities and universities will bring enduring benefits for people of Pakistan. With Gwadar as pivot, the dividends of CPEC will be reaped not only by both countries but shall spread across the entire rim of Indian Ocean Region. Gwadar is set to become a port worthy of its geo-political significance, transforming Pakistan into a prosperous state. CPEC is the seamless fusion of “**Developmental Vision-2025 of Pakistan**” and the “**One Belt – One Road**” vision of China. For Pakistan, CPEC is realization of one of its seven pillars of growth related to regional connectivity in its Developmental Vision.

To conclude, the government needed to adopt holistic, integrated, consultative and coordinated approach to gain maximum benefits from CPEC while removing the fears of the general public. The government needs to make earnest endeavors towards commencing further maritime developmental projects on the coastline including construction of new ports and harbors. This would ensure that in the near future the nation does not suffer any losses due to the shortage of parking space on existing ports. This will also avoid a precarious situation of overcrowding at Gwadar port due to the heavy flux of inbound ships. Recent advent of CPEC has provided us the opportunity to jump start maritime sector. In the same context, it is considered essential to formulate a comprehensive CPEC and Maritime Awareness Campaign Plan to enhance awareness of all stakeholders so that collectively one can contribute to make Pakistan prosperous.

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